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BUSTER



THE LONDON
MYSTERY SELECTION



THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

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| | | |
|-----|---|-----------------------|
| 7 | No Laughs for the Clown | John Taverner |
| 16 | The North Wall | Eleanor M. Inglefield |
| 30 | Come, Dance with Me! | Margaret Whitaker |
| 34 | The Mug | Pete Hammerton |
| 38 | The Last Surprise | Marlon M. Markham |
| 43 | Breakneck Crag | Richard Sullivan |
| 53 | "Get Me Out of Here" | Dorothy B. Bennett |
| 56 | Toni Blake - Red Rose in the Coffin | Derwent Vale |
| 72 | Civic Pride | Roy S. Miller |
| 82 | Raw Kid | James Raesel |
| 86 | The Million Pound Contract | Kennedy Smith |
| 98 | The Call of the Running Tide | Judy Chard |
| 104 | Snakes' Eyes | Tim Carnaby |
| 107 | Final Solution | R. G. Malin |
| 113 | Whirr-Whirr | A. W. Bennett |
| 116 | Intent to Kill? | John Paterson |

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CROOKS IN BOOKS

A quarterly review of some of the finest mystery and detective books recently published appears on PAGE 121

THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION



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THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Just as this issue of London Mystery magazine was going to press the offices were burgled and the staff arrived to find contents of files and desks strewn all over the floors. And detectives taking fingerprints.

This London mystery was never solved and only three "dabs" found on the outside of one window—but—strangest theft of all was the loss of three short stories—proofs, original copy and all! Very fortunately the printers had of course spare proofs at the works and so all was complete in due course. The missing stories, by the way, were "Whirr-Whirr", "Intent to Kill" and "Snakes Eyes"!

Spring finds Toni Blake in the body-snatching business in Berlin and very brilliantly does she play her part in it. John Taverner chills our spines with a story of revenge under the hot suns of southern Spain, Roy S. Miller gives us another of his splendid seaman's yarns in that always authentic background, and Judy Chard produces some quite shocking children in the "Call of the Running Tide".

I wonder if 1970 will see the slow but interesting increase of women writers in the crime and mystery field? This issue gives us five fair contributors—and when you read the book reviews you will notice more and more women succeeding in this quite difficult and demanding kind of authorship. On the whole, women—though lacking sometimes as plot planners—are brilliant at creating a horrible atmosphere—or in the delineation of unspeakable characters!

And now for spring in London and fine and exciting reading to you all.

EDITOR

**"I've always wanted to
be a dress designer.
I used to do all my own
clothes before the
accident. Sometimes
now I look at the
fashions and I know I
could do just as well.
If I had my hands."**

(Sheila, 18)

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THE BRITISH COUNCIL FOR REHABILITATION OF THE DISABLED



NO LAUGHS FOR THE CLOWN

JOHN TAVERNER

Illustrated by Buster



ENREID's International Circus was a fourth-rate outfit; a last disreputable haven for broken-down 'artistes' before they hit the bread-line; a one-show outfit which moved out at dawn before the customers came back for their money.

Fortunately for Henreid there is no equivalent to the R.S.P.C.A. in Spain. The Circus was a mobile prison for five undernourished, mangy old lions, and a temporary reprieve from the knackers' yard for the six spavined horses. Apart from these miserable creatures we had three pythons and two cobras who lived a twilight existence in baskets, and two scabrous Barbary apes who were chained to their own excrement.

We had just pitched camp outside a small, hot, dusty town in southern Spain, and Mitzi was rubbing some foul-smelling linament on my aching back. She had nearly finished when old Henreid hammered on our caravan door.

"Hey, Nimbo! Come and meet our new star," wheezed Henreid.

We stepped out of the caravan into the glare of the mid-day sun, and a tall, slim young fellow stepped from behind Henreid's bulk.

"Hans Schacht . . . This is Nimbo the Clown and his daughter, Mitzi," said Henreid, wiping the perspiration off his pendulous jowls with a grimy bandanna.

Schacht held out a well-manicured hand, and bowed stiffly.

"Herr Nimbo—Fraulein Mitzi, my pleasure," he said, clicking his heels. "I've heard you are supreme on the high-wire, Fraulein."

I shook his hand, and took a quick look at him. He was a blond good-looking Germanic type with strong white teeth and duelling scars like swastikas on his cheeks. It was only his eyes that were wrong. They were old eyes in a young face that mirrored too much knowledge of too many things; things spelling trouble for susceptible women.

Mitzi, her eyes alight with interest, came forward. "How d'you do, Mister Schacht. And what's your act?"

"He's got a turn that'll bring the cash customers flocking in," said Henreid, his bloodshot piggy eyes gleaming. "Hans is a sword-swallower with a difference. A big difference. You'll see tonight."

Schacht smiled at Mitzi, and ran his grey eyes over her budding figure. "I hope you'll like my act, Mitzi. Perhaps you'll tell me after the show, hein?"

Henreid placed a podgy hand on Schacht's shoulder. "Come and meet the rest of my company, Hans. And then we'll get the electrician to rig your tackle."

We watched them walk over to the big top; the great towering expanse of fraying canvas with all its hundreds of roughly-repaired rents looking like the handiwork of a drunken surgeon.

"He's very nice . . . So polite," mused Mitzi, almost to herself.

"He's not for you, my girl," I said sharply. "He's a wrong 'un, and a German as well . . ."

"You're just an old square, Dad. A nice good-looking fellow like that. How can you say he's a wrong 'un? You've never met him before," she said sulkily.

You can't tell kids much these days, so, for the time being, I kept my thoughts to myself.

The circus took on some of the old magic at night; the glaring arc-lights enhanced the tatty costumes and spangles, and the shadows hid a lot of the tawdriness. Even the poor animals gave the illusion of being sleek and fit.

I went through my usual routine of slapstick; the same old pratfalls and custard pies raising the same old belly laughs from the audience. When I bowed out, I sat on the wings to see what twists Schacht had added to one of the oldest acts in show business. Henreid had given him the best spot—the one before the interval.

The skinny juggler took his bow, and left the ring to thin applause, which is all he deserved. He was an alcoholic, and he'd dropped three of his spinning plates in the middle of his act.

Henreid swore at the juggler, and, splendid in his ring-master's outfit, he waddled into the middle of the ring to make his spiel.

"Ladieees and gennelmen!" he bawled in his cracked voice. "It's my great pleasure and privilege to present for your edification and enjoyment an artiste who's performed before all the crowned heads of Europe. Ladieees and gennelmen—Hans Schacht!"

What the Spanish audience made of this I don't know, but the five-

piece brass band did its utmost to sound like a full Guards band and Schacht stepped smartly into the yellow spotlight.

He was naked to the waist, and below that he was dressed in black tight-fitting trousers ending in black patent-leather boots. His broad chest was etched with coiled pectoral muscles, and his slim waist was accentuated by a black leather belt drawn by a silver embossed buckle.

A brassy blonde assistant pranced forward with the paraphernalia of his act which consisted of a long leather sword case, an intricate mass of wires and neon tubes, and two small wooden boxes. Schacht's blond hair glinted in the light as he bowed to the audience, and then he opened the sword case with a flourish.

The first part of his act was old hat. He took out a long sword, and, after passing it among the audience, he tilted back his head and gently eased it down his throat until only the ornate hilt stopped it going further.

The second part of his act provided one of the new twists. He passed a neon tube down his throat, and, when most of it had disappeared, he snapped his fingers. The assistant nodded to the electrician standing in the wings, and the big top was plunged into darkness. What followed was quite spectacular.



The whole of Schacht's rib-cage and innards showed up in the dark shadow against the bright pinkness of the pulsating, coursing blood vessels.

Out of the tense silence of the Spanish audience came forth a deep sighing 'aaaah', and this was followed by a roar of applause and clapping. Henreid had guessed correctly that this act would appeal to the Spaniards. We hadn't heard applause like this in years.

The lights came on, he slowly withdrew the glowing neon tube, and went on to the last part of his act.

The drums rolled as Schacht picked up one of the small wooden boxes, opened it, and pulled out a wriggling white rat by the tail. He lifted the rat above his head, and slowly lowered it into his mouth; swallowing the tame rodent with one convulsive movement of his adam's apple. Swiftly now, he repeated the performance with another rat from the second box.

The crowd were gasping; repelled yet fascinated. Schacht then passed a short length of neon-tubing down his throat, and then, once again, the big top was plunged into darkness.

The neon light was switched on, and this time Schacht presented a most horrific and macabre finale; the rats darkly outlined in his stomach; sluggishly moving shadows against a pink living background.

The ensuing, deafening applause didn't quite drown all the cries of consternation and retching of some of the sickened audience. Slowly, Schacht withdrew the neon tube, and then, with a convulsive movement of his throat, he regurgitated the rats; one following the other in quick succession.

Again the audience applauded wildly, but this sort of act was not for me. Schacht would draw crowds in Spain, but his act nauseated me. I turned away in disgust, and saw Mitzi gazing at him, spellbound; her pretty young face flushed with open admiration. These kids were always on the lookout for new kicks, I thought sourly.

In the grub-tent after the show Schacht was the centre of interest with most of the performers and stage-hands.

"How d'you manage to get that neon tube so far into your guts?" asked the lion tamer.

"Quite simple," said Schacht. "I eat two plates of porridge an hour before I go on. That makes my stomach hang lower."

"Aren't you scared that the tube will burn you?" persisted the lion tamer.

"It doesn't get time to really warm up."

"And how about them rats? I wouldn't have them scurrying around in my belly for anything," queried the strong-man in his oddly high-pitched voice.

"Nothing to it. They're tame, and I feed them tranquilizers every morning."

Mitzi pushed her way through to the front, and Schacht looked at her from under heavy lids. "How did you like my act, Mitzi?"

Mitzi returned his gaze with wide, bold eyes, and I began to feel the first real gnawings of worry; she was barely eighteen, and she'd had a few mild flirtations, but now I sensed she'd really fallen under a man's spell . . .

"It was all so exciting—in a different sort of way," she said.

He smiled down at her, seeming to exclude the rest of us. "That's a pretty frock you're wearing. Blue suits you very well."

Mitzi giggled. "It's not blue, silly. It's a new shade of purple."

He shrugged his shoulders in mock-abasement. "Sorry, Mitzi—but I'm colour-blind . . . Will you and your father sit with me at supper?"

I couldn't see my way out of this one, and so we sat down on either side of him at the long trestle table. For all the notice they took of me during supper, I might well have eaten on my own. After the meal they went for a walk, and I waited anxiously on the caravan's steps.

I was smoking my third pipeful when old Beulah, the fortune-teller, came shambling up to me. "Lo, Beulah, How's the arthritis?"

"Not so bad in this dry country," she replied in her frog-like voice. "But that's not what I've come to see you about . . ."

"What's the trouble? Spent all your money on those patent medicines again? I can't loan you much, but—"

"No, it's not that," she said hesitantly. "It—it's about that new feller Schacht."

"What about him?"

"Look, Nimbo. You've always been a good friend to me. Helping me out with this and that. And you think reading the paw is nothing but a racket."

"Aw, come on, Beulah. Spit it out."

"Well, maybe it's just my woman's intuition, and then maybe it's something else. The Tarot cards told me to speak to you, and warn you about him . . . Schacht's nothing but poison to women—particularly young 'uns," she said, her bright, button-eyes regarding me gravely out

of her brown, seamed face.

I tapped the dottle out of my pipe. "I agree with you, Beulah. But what the hell can I do? You know what kids are like today," I said helplessly.

"Never mind that, Nimbo. You owe it to the kid to try," she said.

"I'll try, Beulah. I'll try all right."

She drew her faded shawl tightly around her thin shoulders. "Good night, Nimbo. Just a friendly warning, eh?"

"Thanks, Beulah. Good night."

She shambled off into the darkness; her crooked gait a symbol of the crystals grinding in her joints.

Mitzi came into the caravan two hours later, and I had confirmation that she was half-way in love; the way she danced into the caravan; her sparkling eyes and high colour; her lip-stick smudged . . .

"Sit down, Mitzi. I want to talk to you," I said.

She stiffened, and I saw the light in her eyes fade. "Before you start—I know what you're going to say," she said sullenly.

"You sit down and listen anyway. Go on. Sit down!"

She sat down and worried at a dark curl with her fingers. "Let's get it over with then," she snapped. "Start preaching!"

I began to get angry. "Look Mitzi. You don't know much about men—"

"Fat chance I get with you on my tail all the time," she burst out.

I bit my lip. "You listen to me, my girl. I've done my best to look after you properly since your mother died. You were five then, and it's not easy for a man to bring up a daughter on his own. There are so many things a mother could've taught you," I paused, wondering how to say it.

"Oh, get on with it, Dad," she said impatiently.

"I've been with circuses all my life, and I know men, Mitzi. I'm telling you again—Schacht is bad all through. He's the sort to get girls into trouble—bad trouble. So you're going to promise now to have nothing further to do with him. You hear me?"

She had my temper, but she had no control over it. Rage flooded into her eyes, and the colour drained out of her lips. "You! You killed my mother, so what are you groaning about? Oh, I know it was an accident, with your legs slipping out of the high trapeze as you caught her in flight. All right! All right! I know it all. But what are you now? A twisted old man who's only got his job as a bum clown because of me.

You lay off me, Dad. You hear? Lay off. I've got my life to live now. Mine!" she yelled at me.

I felt sick and old. Nearly all she had said was true. My face must have reflected my feelings, because, suddenly, she calmed down. "I'm sorry for what I said, Dad—but any affair hatching between Hans and me is our business. No one else's—not even yours . . ."

* * *

Forty towns and three months later I gave up the unequal battle; it had been three months of fighting, pleading and bickering with Mitzi; all culminating in cold silences in the caravan at night, which was the only time we were within a yard of each other.

Of course I had approached Schacht, but he'd just laughed at my appeals and threats. So I went to Henreid.

"Look, Nimbo. Stop making trouble," said Henreid, looking at me with cold piggy eyes. "What's wrong if your daughter has taken a shine to Hans? He's a fine feller. Nothing wrong with him . . . You just keep in line, Nimbo. There are plenty of clowns waiting for your job. Any more trouble and you're out. Get the message?"

"But, Mister Henreid, I—"

"No buts, Nimbo! I only keep you on because of Mitzi, and Hans is packing 'em in every night. Why, another two months of this and I can buy a new big top. Now beat it!"

Shortly after this I saw the dreamy look in Mitzi's eyes fade away to be replaced by a sad, tensed expression. She began to look thin and pinched in the face, with faint dark circles under her eyes.

Several times I attempted to break the miserable silences hanging between us like an almost physical barrier—but I met with no success. I lost all appetite with the worry of it; futilely trying to batten down on what I suspected.

Then one morning all my worst fears were realised.

Around eleven-thirty I was drinking a cup of coffee in the caravan when the old gypsy fortune-teller knocked on the door. "Can I come in?" she croaked agitatedly.

I nodded, and she climbed painfully up the three wooden steps. Her withered, claw-like hands were plucking nervously at her shawl, and suddenly premonition tied a hard knot in my stomach. "What's wrong, Beulah?"

Her button-black eyes were frightened. "It's Mitzi . . ."

"What about her?" I shouted. "For God's sake come out with it!"

"They've just rushed her to hospital, Nimbo. She haemorrhaging badly. Very badly . . . Henreid sent me to tell you . . ."

* * * *

The Spanish doctor's eyes mirrored cold disgust; an expression almost shouting that here was another sordid tragedy from those loose-living circus folk. He spoke a fair amount of English.

"Doctor, she's my daughter, and she's all I've got. Please tell me the truth . . ."

Compassion replaced the disgust in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Senor. We've done what we could . . . Transfused blood . . . But there were complications."

"You—you mean she's dying?" I cried.

He nodded, and said gently: "Go and see your daughter before it's too late, Senor . . . Vaya con Dios."

Her long dark lashes were closed like moth wings over the dark circles and she looked very pale and drained; her lips colourless and her skin almost translucent.

"Mitzi, my baby," I whispered.

Her eyes flickered open, and, when she recognised me, tears welled up and rolled down her cheeks; her lips puckering in the same way as when she was a baby.

"Oh, Dad. I'm so frightened," she whispered.

"Everything's going to be all right," I said, my heart breaking.

She shook her head slowly. "You were so right, Dad. He's no good at all . . . I found out he has a wife and two children . . . But then it was too late . . . I told him, but he only laughed at me . . ." her whispering faded away into the stillness of the room.

I was still holding her chilling hands when the Doctor tapped me gently on the shoulder before closing her glazed eyes.

The funeral took place that same afternoon, and the memory of it is clearly in my mind. All the members of the Circus attended—except Hans Schacht. The plain unvarnished coffin was covered in flowers, and a thin priest conducted a brief service in Latin before the coffin was pushed into a niche in the burial wall of the tiny cemetery. Beulah held my hand as the mason first tapped the stone slab into position, and then sealed it with ready-mixed cement . . .

The mourners filed past me murmuring condolences, and I remem-

ber seeing old Henreid paying the priest and the undertaker.

"Come back with me, Nimbo. I'll make you a cup of tea," said Beulah.

"Thanks, Beulah," I heard myself say. "But I'd like to be on my own for a while . . ."

After they'd all gone, I started walking, my mind dazed with shock. I don't know how far I walked, but eventually I found myself standing on a worn stone bridge overlooking the town's refuse site . . .

My mind cleared, and I walked swiftly back to the town.

* * *

That night I went through all the motions of being a clown, but really I was a mere puppet; my misery anonymous behind the masking paint and the ridiculous false nose; oblivious to the spattering mock-custard pies and streams of water; deaf to the children's delighted laughter.

When I'd finished my turn I sat in the wings on a barrel. Schacht averted his eyes as he strode out into the ring.

" . . . before all the crowned heads of Europe. Ladiees and gennel-meeen—Hans Schacht," cried old Henreid, waving his top hat.

Dully, I watched him go smoothly into his act; the long gleaming sword; the neon tube lighting up his ghostly viscera. And then the rats.

He tilted his head back, and the wriggling rats followed each other down his gullet. He started to smile at his audience, but the smile faded still-born. Suddenly, his eyes were protuberant with fear and horror, and his hands clutched his belly.

He turned towards me, and he screamed as he realised what I'd done.

You see, I'd exchanged his pet white rats for two ferocious ones I'd caught on the refuse site. I'd remembered his telling Mitzi that he was colour-blind, and, after all, there's not much difference between grey and white . . .



THE NORTH WALL

ELEANOR M. INGLEFIELD

Illustrated by Carolyn Dinan

WELL, it is certainly a change from London. Mary and I parted at Plymouth on December 5th, she to go to Penzance where she was spending two weeks with our cousin Emily—and I to catch the branch line to St. Plynts to take up my new Parish. By the time I was settled in the compartment a steady drizzle had set in and the view from the window was far from inviting, so much so, that for the first half hour after crossing the Tamar Bridge, I wondered if my application for a transfer had been such a wise move after all.

There was something inexpressibly bleak and dreary about the County of Cornwall as I saw it that evening, and a most unaccustomed malaise fell upon me. After a time, however, my natural optimism returned and I re-opened the book Emily had lent me, Sir Alister Hardy's "The Divine Flame," and was soon engrossed in the contents.

At Launceston a severe looking lady of about fifty got into the compartment carrying a large basket from which emanated the wails of an imprisoned cat.

I said it was nasty weather to which she replied—with some truth—that it was far worse further up country.

This observation terminated the conversation as far as she was concerned and I returned to my book.

Only the cat continued to utter. Both cat and owner left the compartment two stations further on, and I wasn't sorry to see them go. A congenial companion would have been welcome, but I could do without the cat. By this time what light was left of the day was rapidly fading, and as I reached St. Plynts it was quite dark.

The one porter regarded me with apparent suspicion. His black eyes were cold and unfriendly and in spite of myself I felt a return of the chill that had touched me as I crossed the Tamar. Was this not perhaps my country? I believe we very definitely have our places on this earth, places where we belong and others in which we are definitely not at ease. I hoped my new home was not going to fall into the last category.

The taxi I had ordered, however, was there to meet me, and when I reached it the vicarage proved a pleasant surprise. The housekeeper, Mrs. Hoskin, was without a doubt a great asset. Her's was the first cheerful face I had encountered so far, and the blazing fire and excellent tea she had waiting for me did a great deal to offset the hitherto dismal impression I had formed on my journey.

After I had had my tea and got the chill of the journey out of my system, I went up to the bedroom, where Mrs. Hoskin's husband had already taken my bags. Mr. Hoskin, unlike his wife, was a silent depressed looking man with a pronounced squint. He reminded me of the porter, and, in some odd way of the cat-lady in the train. Mr. Hoskin acted as gardener-handy man and also filled the role of Sexton. All this information came from his wife, however, as Mr. Hoskin hardly uttered half a dozen words.

I dare say it was because I was tired, but somehow I did not take to the room. It was large and quite well furnished and an oil radiator made it pleasantly warm, but in spite of that, cold prickles began to effect my skin. There was a smaller room opening out of it, probably a dressing room, but when I opened the door, I saw it was unfurnished and there was no bulb in the light. Also the sensation of uneasiness and the sense of cold was now even more pronounced, so much so in fact that I did not fetch my torch to examine it more closely but shut the door and went on with my unpacking.

Tiredness I was well aware, can play odd tricks with the nerves. Once or twice I fancied I heard a slight movement in the empty room, but it was palpably fancy, and so I took no notice. Rats, I realised could not be entirely ruled out. The vicarage was some 400 years old and the presence of such creatures could hardly be a matter for surprise.

When I got down to the study, Mrs. Hoskin had cleared the tea and made up the fire. I pulled up my chair and opened my book again with a feeling of relief. I had made up my mind by that time not to use the large bedroom, but see tomorrow if a smaller and more cheerful apartment could not be found in another part of the house. The vicarage after all had seven bedrooms, so there should be plenty of choice. This decision cheered me considerably, and when Mrs. Hoskin came in I told her of my plans.

"Well, I'm not really surprised, sir. It's got a gloomy feeling about it to my way of thinking, but as it is the best room in the house, I thought we had better get it ready and leave you to choose for yourself."

"Who was the last Vicar to live here, Mrs. Hoskin?"

Mrs. Hoskin hesitated. "It was Mr. Francis, sir. He died last December. He was here a matter of a few months before it happened."

"What did he die of?"

"Well, the Doctor said it was a sudden heart attack. It was sad really, dying the way he did. I mean he was only 32. The queer thing was, he wasn't in the bedroom."

"Then where was he?"

"In the little dressing-room, half way between the door and the window. I think maybe he felt poorly during the night and mistook the dressing-room door for the one on to the landing."

"How long have you been here, Mrs. Hoskin?"

"Only just over a year. We came here to look after Mr. Francis. The vicarage was empty for 10 years before that. The Church was served from Launceston."

"Why was that?"

"I don't know, sir. Hoskin and me we come from West Penwith." It struck me that Mrs. Hoskin was being purposely evasive, but I let it pass.

The following morning I walked over to the Church. The interior I am sorry to say had not been well kept. I decided to see whether a rota of cleaners could not be started in the Parish. We had had one in Norwood and it worked very well. My Church Warden, William Pascoe, is a pleasant friendly man. He told me his family had been wardens here for three generations, he, himself, being the third in succession.

When I mentioned my plans for a rota, however, he was not enthusiastic, and it was plain to see he was uneasy.

"It's been tried, Vicar, but it doesn't work."

"Why ever not, it's done in other parishes."

"That's as maybe, sir, but you'll find St. Plynts is different. You see most of the women work all day and it means coming up in the evening."

"So?"

"They won't do that, sir. It's no good taking an Evening Service, either, not in the winter that is."

"But what in heaven's name are they afraid of?"

William Pascoe looked me squarely in the eyes and said—

"Nothing in heaven's name, sir, you can be sure of that."

I stood there staring at him! I could hardly believe the evidence of my own senses. Was I really in England in the 20th Century or had I been thrown back into the Dark Ages?

"I'm sorry, Vicar, but you might as well know it from the beginning." "There isn't a soul who will come up here after dark."

Suddenly it struck me that to pursue the subject further would be unwise—at that point at any rate, and I said no more.

After Pascoe had gone, I went back to the altar to say my mid-day Office. I do not know how long the tapping had been going on, it only impinged on my senses as I was finishing the concluding prayer. For a minute or two I stood listening to it. It wasn't continuous, but intermittent, and it had a curiously hollow ring.

Could anybody be working on the structure, I wondered? If so, it was odd that Pascoe hadn't mentioned it. After a few minutes I walked down the Nave trying to locate the sound, and found it was coming, quite unmistakeably, from the north wall of the Church. The conviction that it might be a death-watch beetle began to dawn on me, as an unpleasant possibility. If it were, I had inherited a packet of trouble.



Up 'till then I had never heard a beetle at work. Had I done so, I should have realised this sound was too loud; as it was, I stood looking up the wall with fund-raising plans already beginning to form in my mind. It was then I saw the lettering. The letters were about 15 feet up and cut very roughly into the wall. It was too far up for me to be able to read them, so I went into the belfry and got a ladder.

When I got up to the inscription, I saw the words—

Pray for the Soul
of

Julius Cornelius, who died December 15th, 1949.

*"From the powers of darkness good Lord
deliver us."*

If it was meant as a memorial tablet it was a very odd one, I reflected.

On the way out I paused at the list of St. Plynts incumbents and there, sure enough, he was—Julius Cornelius 1929–1949. Seeing it there gave me quite a shock. As I closed the door of the Church I heard the tapping again.

I asked Mrs. Hoskin about the tablet when she brought my luncheon, but she didn't appear to know anything about it.

"You'll have to ask Mr. Warleggan about that, sir. He knows all there is to know about St. Plynts. He writes books on ancient history."

"Where does Mr. Warleggan live?"

"At the Chantry. It's the big house on the St. Austell Road. You'll see him on Sunday, anyways. He always reads the lessons."

And with that I had to be satisfied.

* * *

I have now spoken to William Pascoe about the possible presence of the beetle and was surprised at his look of horror. Then he seemed to pull himself together and said in his usual civil way that he had never heard the things himself, but if I was worried, he would ask Tom Old, the local builder to come and have a look at the rafters.

It sounded a sensible plan and the conversation passed into other channels.

Mr. Warleggan came to see me the next day, which was Saturday. He was a stocky little man, inclined to be rotund, with a cheerful face and a small vandyke beard. After we had discussed the Lessons to be read the following day, I mentioned my fears for the Church timbers.

"Oh," said Warleggan. "So you've heard it too?"

"What do you mean—too. Has anybody else?"

"Francis did about ten days before he died. He mentioned it to me. Like you, he thought it might be beetles. I believe he had somebody out to look at the timbers, but I'm not certain, I was away at the time. People hereabouts know about it. According to local folk-lore it's something about the Church that cannot be explained. It's not easy to get people to talk though."

"Oh, come," I expostulated, "are you trying to tell me the place is haunted?"

Warleggan gave me a quick look.

"Well, I wouldn't put it as strongly as that. Mind you, I have never heard the tapping. Francis was the first person to mention it to me. I did make local enquiries though, and I gathered quite a few people had heard it too, and not a soul will come here after dark. When I first came here 7 years ago, the Church was being served from Launceston and the vicarage was empty. Francis was the first Vicar to occupy it since 1949."

"When Julius Cornelius died."

"Ah, so you've read the inscription."

"I have, and a most extraordinary one it is."

"So was his burial, they put him in the North Wall."

"They? Who?"

"His parishioners. Apparently they felt it was safer to make certain he was well and truly incarcerated."

"Good heavens, Warleggan, what a fantastic story. It sounds more like the Middle Ages."

"So I gather did Julius Cornelius. He was something of a lad from what I can gather. Have you never come across the North Wall superstition? I am surprised! It's fairly widely known in England and Wales. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the belief was very strong and down here in parts of Cornwall, still lingers."

"I have now gone into the life of this man Cornelius very extensively during the past year. Research has not been easy owing to the fact that very little of his doings got committed to paper. There was nothing actually proved against him during his lifetime and the Church Authorities had no reason to carry out investigations. Anyhow it's doubtful whether they would have done so, in any case, unless the issue had been forced. The Church, as you know, dreads nothing so much as a scandal, and Julius Cornelius was nicely tucked away down here, so

matters were allowed to rest.

"What did they think of the North Wall burial"?

"Nobody knows, at any rate they never interfered. The service was carried out by a local Vicar, who we suppose had no scruples and that was that".

"But what has this to do with the tapping"?

"Nothing, we hope! Anyhow, I must be on my way. See you tomorrow".

Really, I am afraid our local historian is something of a crank. He lives alone I am told, and loneliness is never good for any man. I shall be very glad when Mary comes home. This place and its inhabitants might well get on ones nerves in the long run.

* * *

Its December 10th and I have been reading up quite a bit about the North Wall superstition governing certain burials. The idea as Warleggan said, was more widely believed than I ever imagined. Connected with it was the superstitious fear of the north side of the churchyard where, according to this barbarous belief no good soul is ever laid to rest. There are a great many books on the very top shelf in the library, books that have not been disturbed for some generations I should say, judging by the dust and cobwebs up there. There do not seem to be any library steps. I must speak to Mrs. Hoskin about it. There is a possibility that there might be a volume up there that could throw more light upon this curious belief.

Later that evening I broached the subject to Mrs. Hoskin, who said that as long as she had been at the rectory there had been no steps. However, if I wanted, Hoskin could soon knock me up some. He had plenty of driftwood in the shed.

I thought this was an excellent idea and after she had departed, Hoskin appeared to make measurements etc. While he was doing it, I asked him if the north side belief was still held down here. Hoskin gave me a queer look, at once nervous and hostile.

"Nobody here will bury on the north side".

"I see". I said no more . . . not then, but I was determined to stamp out this nonsense as quickly as possible.

* * *

December 11th. Pascoe is quite right about people refusing to come

to the Church after dark. This is the second Sunday evening I have rung the bell and waited in an empty Church. Quite how I am going to explain my cancelling the service to the Bishop, I do not know. Still it's no good crossing one's bridges before arriving.

I stayed on and said my Office before locking up and going back to the rectory. The tapping was very persistent that evening and various unholy imaginings began to drift through my mind. It was, I found myself thinking, almost as if somebody were asking to be let out. I vowed I must not let this nonsense get a hold on me.

When I got back to my study, I found Warleggan waiting for me.

"Any luck?"

"Nobody turned up, if that's what you mean."

"And they won't, old boy, they won't. I have lived amongst your flock for 7 years and believe me, I know them backwards. Mind you I like them, but they take some understanding."

"So I can imagine. Will they come in the summer?"

"Oh. Yes, and they'll keep it up 'till the end of September, after which you can put up the shutters 'till the spring, as far as Evensong is concerned."

Just at that moment, Hoskin knocked at the door and said the steps were ready and would I try them? The steps were very well made and by standing on the top platform, I could easily reach the top shelf.

"You're the first person who has even shown any interest in the top shelves", said Warleggan, "got anything special in mind?"

"The North Wall principally. There may well be a book up there dealing with the belief."

"That's an idea. Let's get a few down now and have a look at them."

I applied to Mrs. Hoskin for a duster and a dust pan and brush and we started on our quest. The first half dozen were not worth the bother, they were volumes of what appeared to be exceedingly dull sermons. A thick book of parochial history looked more promising, however, and after dusting the sermons I replaced them and handed the history to Warleggan waiting below.

"I've seen this in the Public Library", he said, opening it. "Yes, I remember this engraving of the Logan Stone, Hello!"

"What's the matter?"

"There are some papers folded inside the section dealing with this district and its written in Cornish. By jove, this is interesting."

"Can you speak Cornish?"

"Not really, but I can read it with the help of a Cornish dictionary."

I came down the steps and together we pored over the yellow pages.

"It looks like a description of some kind of ceremony", said Warleggan, turning them over. "Let's look at the last page, there might be a signature or something. Yes, there is, it's old Julius himself, believe it or not."

He pointed to a signature written in a spidery but firm hand. Julius Cornelius, December 1948. For a moment we stood staring down at the document, then Warleggan said quietly—

"Do you really want me to translate it?"

"I should be grateful if you would. It might possibly throw some light on these ridiculous superstitions."

Warleggan gave me a sudden quizzical look and thrust the papers into his pocket.

"All right! I'll bring the translation over tomorrow evening."

"And come to supper", I called, as he walked down the drive.

* * *

I have moved into the bedroom overlooking the kitchen garden and find it entirely satisfactory. Mary has a charming room overlooking the front drive, and Emily, over Christmas, will sleep in the room opening out of it. The large room with the dressing-room I have had locked. The Hoskins are out tonight at a Whist Drive, I believe—and won't be in 'till after eleven. Mrs. Hoskin had left my supper on a tray and I had it in the study while finishing my letters. It was about ten o'clock that I noticed the smell! Thinking Mrs. Hoskin must have left something on the Aga that should have been moved off, I went into the kitchen. Nothing, however, was amiss there! The spotless Aga had all its lids down. I opened the oven and found the same clean vacancy.

The smell I noticed was rather less in the kitchen than in the rest of the house, principally the hall. Thinking perhaps the Hoskins had some stove or other upstairs I went up to investigate. Up at the top of the house, however, the odour was again less. The Hoskins room was guiltless of any stove or anything that appeared untoward. It was the main landing where the smell was strongest. It was a strange scent. It wasn't incense, as we know it, though it was one of the nature of incense. There was something vaguely disturbing about it. I looked into the bedrooms but could see nothing unusual. That left the locked room. I went to the door and listened. The smell was now so strong that there

was no longer any doubt from whence it came. I knew the sensible course was to open the door and investigate, but for some reason or another I could not make myself do it.

I stood there, my fingers on the key and tried to fight off the miasma of nausea and fear that gripped me. This was something I had never experienced in my life. On the face of it the situation was utterly ridiculous, an odd smell emanating from an empty bedroom and I was afraid to go in. Afraid of what for heaven's sake? I tried to picture the Bishop's face, if I admitted as much to him, but failed: imagination has its ultimate limits.

This excursion into reality, however, did me good and I turned the key in the lock and stood in the doorway. Beyond the heavy oak door the room was dark and smelt damp. Then I heard the chanting beyond the door that leads from the larger room into the dressing-room. The voice of an old man, thin and high. I couldn't hear the words at all distinctly, but I knew they were in Latin. It should have been the Mass, but it wasn't, God help me, it wasn't, and all the time that deadly acrid scent was all about me, cloying my senses and paralysing my will. I felt myself drawn forward as if I were roped, my feet began to move in spite of myself. I tried to pray, but my brain was numb and the words could not form. Yet in spite of it my lips formed the ancient words of light—"deliver us from evil."

Then something hit me in the face, it hit me fair and square and I fell flat on my back on the landing. A sudden gust of wind had come and slammed the heavy door in my face. Another minute and I should have been inside and it would have slammed behind me. I got up dazed and thankful for my deliverance. I could no longer hear the chanting, though I could still smell that devilish scent. Shaking in every limb, I went downstairs and into my study. Sitting at my desk I gave thanks for my escape. Had poor Francis gone to investigate or had he been drawn as I had myself, by that dreadful, compelling power. He, poor fellow, was the wrong side of the door, and for him there was no escape.

Presently I heard the Heskins come in from their afternoon off. Their voices in the kitchen sounded like music in my ears. By and by I heard them go up to bed, and presently I followed their example.

* * *

December 12th. Rather to my surprise I slept well after my un-

pleasant adventure, but I dreamed about young Francis, and woke up with an urgent desire to go and look for his grave. I walked across to the Churchyard before breakfast and found the grave under a maple tree on the east side. The date of his death was December 12th. Somehow I wasn't surprised. In my dreams, Francis had been near me trying to warn me about something!

Strange happenings so often seem to be ruled by anniversaries though there appears to be no reason why this should be so.

I returned to the vicarage more gravely disturbed than I liked to admit. Mrs Hoskin was just leaving the dining-room as I entered it. She looked pale and rather upset I thought, and I asked her if anything was wrong.

"Oh. Sir, it's Mr. Warleggan! Mrs. Lynam who does, for him has just telephoned. He's dead."

"Dead. What happened?"

"Mrs Lynam found him lying in the drive when she got there this morning, and she thought he'd been there during the night. It seemed as if he had been running."

I left at once and went down to the Chantry. The body had been moved to the house and the police surgeon had arrived. I told him that Mr. Warleggan had been with me the evening before and was due to supper this evening. The Sergeant was in Warleggan's Study. I noticed the papers I'd given Warleggan lying in a neat pile on the desk.

"He was going to translate those papers for me", I said. "But it seems he hadn't started on them."

"Doesn't look like it, sir. Would you like them back?"

I nodded and he handed them to me.

"Don't often see Cornish in these days, sir."

"No! I suppose you can't read it?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

I put the papers in my pocket and we went into times of arrival and departure the evening before, and after it was over, I went to the Church. My mind was in a state of confusion. All I could think of was Warleggan running for his life through the darkness! Why?

It certainly wasn't on his walk back from the vicarage. The papers on his desk proved that. He must have sat down at his desk and perhaps, with the help of his Cornish dictionary read the papers through. After that what occurred was anybody's guess!

I opened the door of the Church and stepped inside. Coming from

the sunlight, the interior struck me as dark, also there was a smell there that was curiously familiar. I saw the confusion long before I reached it. The pick-axe lay on the stones, and the bricks and rubble all about it were scattered over the pews. I stood there staring at the gaping hole in the north wall and said a prayer for the soul of Edward Warleggan . . .

* * *

As soon as I found the half sheet of paper thrust in between the pages of the manuscript, I rang the Police Sergeant and asked him to call at the vicarage on his way home. Though I am well aware, the last words of Roger Warleggan constituted nothing in the way of evidence, except to suggest that he had suffered some extraordinary brain storm, it would be wholly wrong of me to withhold the paper from the proper authorities. Yet what could I make of it, what could anybody make of it? The words were neatly and precisely written in Warleggan's normal hand-writing. Nothing in the script suggested cerebral agitation or in fact, any degree of excitement at all. Yet the words were fantastic, beyond all reason. "If I had my way, I would take this monster's body out of the north wall and put a stick through him . . ."

He must have written those dreadful words and gone down to the Church to do just that and then . . . I watched the Sergeant's face as he read the bit of paper I had handed to him.

"Well?" I said, as he laid it down.

"Mr. Warleggan was a writer of thrillers, sir. He wrote Cornish history under his own name and thrillers under the name 'Roger Gould'. Maybe you have read some of them. Very exciting they are, most of them. My son's got them all. No doubt Mr. Warleggan was making these notes for a new book. Typical of his style, if I might say so."

"So you do not think it has any bearing on Mr. Warleggan's death?"

"None whatsoever, sir."

He departed stolidly confident, leaving me to try and rough out some notes for my Sunday sermon. Perhaps after all, the Sergeant is right. At any rate I like to pretend that he might be. The verdict on Roger Warleggan was accidental death. He had suffered a heart seizure whilst running at high speed. There were no footprints other than his own to account for his flight. He must, said the Coroner, have suffered some inexplicable brain storm, as prior to his death he had made a

savage attack on the north wall of the Church and actually dislodged a number of bricks. There appeared to be no reason other than an intense cerebral disturbance, for this extraordinary action, etc. etc.

* * *

December 14th. Mary and Emily arrive tomorrow, thank goodness. The terrible damage to the north wall has been repaired and it is now back to normal, also I am glad to be able to relate that the ridiculous story of the north wall burial has proved to be absolutely false. I looked into the cavity before the masons got to work and found it empty. *There was no body there;* and in my opinion there never had been. These fantasies, however, die very hard. When I told William Pascoe about it, he said nothing, but his face went pale and he hurried away. I intend to touch on the subject in my Sunday sermon. I must try and up-root this terrible superstition from the hearts of my people.

It is very quiet here tonight. The Hoskins, as it's Wednesday, are out. The dogs in the village are very noisy! What can be the matter with them? At least half a dozen of them are howling. They sound like the wolves I heard in Russia when I went there just after the war. Just like wolves howling in the snow. I opened the drawer of my desk to get out another sheet of paper and found the Cornish manuscript where I had thrust it away the day poor Warleggan died. The half sheet of paper on which Warleggan had written his so called "notes" lay on the top and I read it again.

I thought of the question he had put to me—

"Do you really want me to translate it?"

He had, I suppose, guessed something of the nature of the contents, and, I quite unwillingly, had sent him to his death!

The thought quite startled me. What a ridiculous idea! No doubt what he had read in Cornelius' paper, had given him the idea for a "thriller" and, as the Sergeant had quite rightly surmised, he began to make notes. That theory might well have held water had it not been for the fact that after writing it, Roger Warleggen had gone down to the Church and started on his inexplicable attack on the north wall.

He had taken the pick-axe from the Sexton's shed and gone quietly and deliberately into the empty Church! Then he had left the Church and run for his life back to the Chantry! What horror is this? I am making this entry with those infernal papers lying on my desk in front of me. When I have finished, I am going to put them into the heart of

the fire where they can do no further harm. They have been the death of at least one man and he will be their final victim. I wish those wretched dogs would stop howling.

It's turned very cold all of a sudden . . .

* * *

When the Hoskins returned from the Parish Whist Drive, they smelt the burning.

"Come on, Hoskin, there's a fire somewhere", said his wife. "I wonder the Vicar doesn't smell it."

"There's an odd pong in the place, apart from burning", said Hoskin, as they crossed the hall.

"So there is, whatever can it be?"

Smoke poured out as they opened the door. The hearth rug was ablaze—the Vicar sprawled over his desk, they thought at first he was partially suffocated, but it wasn't suffocation, his neck was broken and he was dead.

A few weeks later, Mary Anstey went to see the Bishop, taking with her, her brother's diary.

Whatever conclusion his Lordship arrived at after reading those final entries, one thing emerged. The vicarage at St. Plynts in the County of Cornwall was ordered to be demolished and a more modern and convenient building erected on the far side of the village . . .



COME, DANCE WITH ME!

MARGARET WHITAKER

"Please Roy," I whispered. "Please help me! It was an accident." I had decided on the line I must take and sat down beside him on the settee . . .

WHEN THE doorbell rang, I stood paralysed on the spot, unable to think clearly with the murder weapon still in my hands.

If I tried to pretend I wasn't at home, it might not go well for me later when questions were asked—and questions were sure to be asked, since I live right next door to the victim. I grinned, remembering how convenient this had been!

Realising I had to act quickly, I ran upstairs silently on the thick carpet, heading for the bathroom where I had earlier prepared the bath in readiness for the cleansing I thought I might need. But luckily, underneath the thick plastic raincoat I wore, now spattered with blood, my nakedness had survived this indignity. A quick check in the full-length mirror revealed nothing in the way of crimson stains and, with a sigh of relief, I hurriedly washed the blood from my hands. Afterwards, I rinsed the make-up from my face; at the same time damping my hair with a face-cloth to give the impression of just having emerged from the bath. This, I thought, would also account for any undue delay in answering the door.

I then hastily folded the bloodstained raincoat into an untidy ball, with the murder weapon—an old kitchen knife—wrapped inside, and placed them in a temporary hiding place behind the airing cupboard. The raincoat destined for later incineration in the basement boiler, and the knife in the river.

Hustling into my dressing-gown, I finally answered the door after what seemed an eternity; but the apology springing to my lips was startled into silence by the sight of the huddled figure leaning heavily against the porch.

"Roy!" I recognised him instantly in the dim light reflected from the hallway.

"Hullo, Sis." He stumbled in and I hurriedly closed the door behind him and led the way into the living-room.

"What on earth's wrong?" I asked, when he had seated himself heavily on the settee. "Are you ill?"

He shook his head wearily.

"Not in the accepted sense," he replied at last. "But I do feel sick; in fact, I feel very sick—and I think you know what I mean!"

I caught my breath sharply. He knew! But how could he have known? And so soon? I tried to play for time.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Oh, come off it, Helen!" He was angry now. The small purple veins stood out on his forehead as they always did when he was angry.

"You know," he went on, "that I always deliver groceries to Miss Gray every Friday around this time—or had you forgotten? She usually leaves her door on the latch and this evening I walked right into . . . into . . ." his voice choked in his throat and he buried his head in his hands.

"Oh, God!—Helen!" he moaned, "Why!—Why?"

I had decided on the turn I must take and sat down beside him on the settee.

"Please, Roy," I whispered. "Please help me! It was an accident, I swear!"

"Accident!" his voice echoed loudly. "You forget I saw it, Helen—I saw it! It's like a bloodbath in there—and you say it was an *accident*?" He jumped up and took me savagely by the arm.

"I have had enough of this, Helen! Enough! Twice before I believed you—or half believed you . . ." his voice trailed off, wonderingly. "But this, Helen. *This!* Nothing can convince me that *this* was an accident!"

He turned away from me agitatedly and began pacing the floor, his lips moving silently and lean face gray with shock.

Presently, he came abruptly to a halt before me and, placing his hand roughly on my shoulder, began gently:

"You do realise, Helen, don't you, that this can't go on? That this . . ." he hesitated, "that this . . . this violence is a symptom of an illness too grave for us to handle alone?"

I couldn't understand what he was getting at; that something I enjoyed doing so much could be described as an illness!

I remembered Miss Sculley and Miss Worth. Those lonely ladies on the Social Committee who had both met violent ends with a little help

from me. I can still smile with satisfaction as I recall Miss Sculley's look of profound surprise when I pushed her over the cliff on the day of the annual outing in June.

We were quite alone together at the time, the others having gone off rambling; so I was able to nip back to the coach afterwards without being seen and managed to give the impression I'd remained there all the afternoon, under the pretext of a headache, when the rest of the party returned. It went down well when the questions were asked later. Poor Miss Sculley! It took them hours to locate her broken body wedged between the craggy rocks and bushes. We were very late getting home from that outing—well into the early hours, as I remember. The coroner's verdict was "Death by Misadventure".

Miss Worth met her end just as effectively, except that she didn't have so far to fall. I pushed her into the river one night, a month or so later, as she was enjoying her regular evening stroll. Being a non-swimmer, her body had swiftly been swept downstream. She had been too surprised at first to cry out, and when she finally found her voice it was too late. Apparently I was the only one within hearing distance. It was two weeks before they found her. I recall there was a great deal of unsavoury gossip in the village at the time of her disappearance—she being so fond of young Mr. Plummer, and all; but it turned out that he had been away on holiday during the crucial period, so an elopement was quickly ruled out when he returned unsuspectingly at the full height of the scandal.

Those responsible for spreading the rumour were quick to turn his appearance to advantage, maintaining that they had always thought no man would look twice at poor Miss Worth anyway. When her bloated corpse eventually came to light a few days later, her much maligned reputation rapidly progressed from harlot to martyr, as it became all too apparent that they wished they had kept their mouths shut in the first place. Once again, the coroner bought in a verdict of "Death by Misadventure".

* * *

But dwelling on past glory wasn't going to help me now.

I could see that Roy was in a recalcitrant mood, which was vaguely upsetting because he had been quite pliable before; although I was quick to realise that he had granted me the benefit of the doubt more readily on those previous occasions.

"I must say the sight of blood has made you very disagreeable!" I retorted sulkily. "Perhaps I should have pushed her in the river!"

"Helen!" The shocked tone of his voice was not caused so much by my remark as the tacit admission of my earlier crimes which, hitherto, I have never owned up to, despite his suspicions.

"Well!" I taunted, stung by the pomposity of his manner. "It's your move—what are you going to do about it?"

This time he left me in no doubt. He made for the telephone; his whole manner indicating prompt action before he allowed himself to change his mind.

My own actions were equally prompt. I reached for the heavy copper vase on the hall table as he bent to dial the number of the local constabulary, and swiftly brought it crashing down on his skull. He must have had a tough skull. There was no blood.

Under the cover of darkness, I managed to drag him next door and into Miss Gray's gory sitting-room. I don't know how I achieved it without incident, but luck is usually with me in these enterprises.

I placed him carefully next to Miss Gray's cold body and then, removing from my dressing-gown pocket the razor-blade I had brought with me in readiness, I slashed his wrist and left him.

I was rather sorry, because Roy had been good to me in his way; but the consolation remained that he was, after all, only a half-brother. Psychiatrists would have it, I suppose, that I had always inwardly resented the fact that his father had perished peacefully of bronchitis in hospital, whilst my own had died a raving lunatic in Broadmoor. But this is not the case. I am proud of my heritage and try to live up to it. Being a reasonable young woman, I hope to continue doing so for a good many years yet.

I must say I don't know what the police will make of this one. Roy and Miss Gray were much of an age—perhaps they'll put it down to a *crime passionnel* with Roy the repentant lover! I hope so. I've lived here for quite a while now and Police Constable Larkin has always been a dim-witted man in my view.

In any event, nothing and no one—not even Roy—could have stopped me from attending the Hallowe'en Dance tonight.

Since Miss Sculley and Miss Worth are no longer with us, and now Miss Gray, this leaves me the only spinster remaining on the Committee—indeed, in the whole village!—and our dear Mr Thurloe, the new organiser, is so good-looking . . .

THE MUG

PETE HAMMERTON

Dougal squeezed his brain for an answer. There had to be one. And he had to decide what to do. There couldn't be any going back and trying again another time . . .



QUARTER of a mile before the house Dougal reversed off the lane into a field and pointed the car back towards the motorway, just in case.

He took a deep breath of night air, then set off stealthily towards the dark mass of the building, glimpsed through the trees.

Funny to think of a place that size for just two people. Funny to think of Betty in there with that invalid husband of hers.

He wondered whether she would be with him tonight. Probably not, considering the way she had carried on today. Probably lying awake in her own room straining her ears to hear him break in.

Dougal sidled round the house looking for the right window and muttering, "Four, three, two, one, zero." No blast off. It wasn't a countdown, it was the combination of the safe that Betty had found out at last. Good old Betty. Good old sucker Betty.

Fantastic, really, the way these women would fall for a line like his. How could she honestly believe, at her age, with her figure, that he would go with the loot and wait for her in Naples as arranged?

Yet she did believe. She would go there, deserting her husband, wrecking her marriage, and she would wait patiently for her dream lover.

Who would meantime be prospecting for the next sucker. Dougal couldn't help smiling.

He smeared treacle on a window pane, stuck paper over this, smashed it with one quick, quiet blow, then peeled the broken glass away.

Inside, just where Betty had told him, he found the flex of the burglar alarm, and quickly snicked it.

He only had one regret about this job. No gun. It had been stupid of him to give Betty his automatic this afternoon, but she had been so upset that it seemed simplest to give in. After all, she did have the combination.

His mind went back to the park again as he eased the window up and slid over the sill. He had never seen her so agitated.

"I'm sure he knows something. He's been acting so suspicious lately, asking all kinds of questions." Her pale eyes were jumping wildly as she hugged close to him on the park bench. "He'd kill me if he found out. He's so jealous it terrifies me."

"Shush now." Dougal stroked the frizzy hair, soothing her. "You mustn't imagine things. How could he possibly find out? He doesn't even know I exist."

Betty was trembling against him. "What if he follows me? I keep getting the idea I'm being followed these days. It's all right for you to laugh."

Then she jumped with alarm at some slight noise in the bushes. And when he got up to investigate, there was the crashing of something fleeing through the undergrowth.

"A dog," he told her. "Only a dog."

"Was it really? Did you see it?"

So then he had lied and described the animal—"A huge alsatian." But by this time she was so hysterical nothing would do but to give her his gun.

"After all, if I'm wrong," she said, tucking it away in her handbag, "it can't do any harm. And quite honestly I'll feel happier about you tonight, knowing you're not carrying one."

So that was it, he thought. That was the real reason for all those dramatics. She was scared for him.

His eyes were getting adjusted to the darkness of the room now. He could make out the bookshelves that lined the walls. Yes, this was the library all right. And behind that mirror over the mantelpiece should lie the wall safe that Betty had described.

But first the usual precautions.

There were two doors. One had a key in the lock. He turned this. No fear of being surprised that way. The other door wouldn't lock. Dougal checked that it opened inwards, then quietly and slowly pushed a couch against it.

Now, with the window wide open, he would have ample time to escape if anyone tried to enter the room.

He tiptoed back to the mantelpiece. The mirror was supposed to slide aside. Yes! And there was the dark circle of the safe. "Four," he whispered, turning the wheel. "Three, two, one. And zero!"

Ah, that delicious little click as the circular metal door swung open. For the first time, Dougal switched on his tiny torch.

A gun and some pieces of silver, nothing much. Where was the money? Six thousand, Betty had said. It must be here!

Frantically he groped around, hoping for some overlooked cranny. There was nothing. He crammed the silver candlesticks and bowl in his satchel then froze, staring at the automatic.

It was his own, the one he had given Betty.

A shiver ran over his body as he picked up the gun and turned it in his gloved fingers. What could this mean? That Betty had sold him out to her husband? No, because in that case there would be no loot at all in the safe, not even this paltry silverware.

What then? That he had found the gun and taken it from her? O.K. But in that case, if he could trust the gun to the safe, why not leave the cash there?

Something didn't fit.

Dougal squeezed his brain for the answer. There had to be one. And he had to decide what to do. There could be no going back and trying another time—the signs of his break-in couldn't be removed.

He must either cut and run with what he had, or try to find the cash. Not much hope of that in a house this size though.

Unless of course he had a go at Betty's old man. Yes, why not? An invalid without proper use of his arms, he should be a pushover for a bit of roughing up.

Betty wouldn't like it, of course. How many times had she begged, "You won't touch him, will you? You won't hurt him?" Guilt probably, at the prospect of running out on him.

But Betty had outlived her usefulness anyway.

Yes. Clenching the gun, Dougal moved towards the door he had locked, the one to the hall.

At that instant a line of light appeared above the door. He froze in amazement. And in the clear silence of the night came the distinct purr of someone dialling the telephone.

Don't panic! he told himself. It could be anything. Maybe the husband's had one of his bad turns and Betty's calling the doctor.

And even if not . . .

Quietly he turned the key and then the handle, and pushed. But the door wouldn't budge this time. It was secured on the other side.

And with this discovery, with his heart going like a bongo he heard

a man's voice say, "Give me the police."

Dougal dived through the window and sprinted for his car.

Hearing the noise of fleeing footsteps, Betty's husband smiled wryly. He left the phone dangling, drew the bolt he had earlier quietly fastened as a precaution, and opened the library door.

Inside, he flicked the light on and went to the safe. He nodded with satisfaction, seeing it empty. Then he returned to the hall to pick up the dangling receiver.

"Police?" he said. "I wish to report a murder. Yes, in the course of a burglary it seems."

And he stared sadly at the crumpled body of Betty with its neat little hole in the forehead.



THE LAST SURPRISE

MARION M. MARKHAM

Now, he thought, I'll give Janet a surprise to end all surprises. The irony of the phrase struck him as funny, and he laughed, startling even himself. He stopped the sound suddenly and stood listening . . .

CHET LAY in the darkness, the familiar smothering feeling clutching his chest. The hands on the clock face pointed toward two-fifteen. That damn clock. One of Janet's surprises. How like her to spend so much just to have a small light behind the dial so that he could time his insomnia. Lying awake beside her night after night had not seemed so unbearable until he had been able to watch the dragging hours. But, of course, Janet, who slept soundly through everything, could not understand that.

The faint light from the clock dial illuminated Janet's mole-like face, too. Before, he had only to look at her ugliness in those rare moments at home when he could not keep his eyes on television or the morning paper. But now, with the damn clock, he could see, and in fact could not seem to keep his eyes away from her receding chin, protruding mouth, and beakish nose.

He got up, as he had done so many nights before, and walked into the living room of their small bungalow. There he sat, in a darkness lighted only by his own cigarette, and thought once again of killing his wife. Finally, he ground the cigarette into an ashtray and felt his way back to the dark kitchen. His foot bumped against the empty burgundy bottle which was sitting on the floor next to the door. Damn.

The burgundy had been another of Janet's surprises. Last night, after work, she had met him at the front door with two glasses of sparkling burgundy and a broad smile that showed how prominent her teeth still were, despite six month's work by an equally prominent, and expensive, orthodontist.

"Surprise, dear."

"What are we celebrating?" Chet had asked.

"We've been married seven years, five months, and three days."

As if he hadn't been aware of every minute of it. Chet had gulped the red wine quickly, because he had needed a drink, and because he hadn't been able to think of anything to say which would not give away the anger that swelled within him whenever Janet spent his money on

one of her stupid surprises.

"Honestly, Chet. You don't drink sparkling burgundy like it was a fifty cent shot from the corner tavern."

Once Chet had been impressed by her air of refinement. Now he knew it only meant that Janet had expensive ideas.

He picked up the empty burgundy bottle and crashed it through the glass of the back door. Just like launching a ship, he thought. Me. I'm launching me.

The shattering sound reverberated for a moment, and Chet stood still. But Janet did not hear it. She never heard anything at night—not his pacing, nor his sighing, nor even the swearing he sometimes directed toward her while she slept.

He opened the back door, unlatched the wire screen, and dropped the heavy bottle into the dustbin, as Janet had asked him to do several times during the evening. Well, Janet baby, he thought. There goes your last surprise.

Inside the kitchen again, he felt for an old pronged tin opener in a drawer, and took it back to slit the screen door. When the opening was large enough for his hand, he bent the screening back. Washing the can opener thoroughly, and wiping it so that there would be no fingerprints on it, he returned it to the drawer. Then he moved back to the living room.

He lay down on the sofa, lifting his head and pounding it back on the pile of throw pillows at one end, making a deep dent. Then he spread the rug over himself and threw it back again as he stood up.

Now, he thought, I'll give Janet a surprise to end all surprises. The irony of the phrase struck him as funny, and he laughed, startling even himself. He stopped the sound suddenly and stood listening, as if he thought someone would come through the darkness to find out why he was so happy. After a brief second he tiptoed past the bedroom door to the bathroom.

Hung over the pipe under the sink was the pair of disposable plastic gloves Janet used when she coloured her hair. Before, the shapeless fingers, stained with red, had always annoyed him. How like her to try to save on disposable gloves while she spent a fortune on trying to get her teeth straightened. And how convenient for him.

He pulled the thin gloves over his own hands and crept back into the bedroom. Janet's breathing was regular and heavy. She's dead to the world he thought, and once again wanted to laugh. But there was no time for laughter now. He opened his pyjama drawer and felt at the

back for the old knife he had bought at a Salvation Army store on his last hunting trip.

For a moment he looked at Janet, wanting to awaken her so that she would know what he was doing. He wanted to give her a surprise for a change. She loved them so. What had her last words to him been, at bedtime?

"The wine tonight is just the start. Next week we'll be celebrating something big." To Janet, next week was always going to be better. But he knew that next week would only bring bills—from the store for tonight's wine, from the orthodontist, or from the sporting goods store for his new golf cart. Well, there would be no more of her damn bills anyway. From now on the money would be all his—to spend on horses, or fishing trips, or bar-girls. No more mortgage payments for Chet Hale.

His arm plunged down, and then he drew his hand away from the knife, now firmly embedded in Janet's heart.

Only one more thing to do before he called Dr. Bennet and the police. Cutting up the plastic gloves, he flushed them down the toilet. Now there was no evidence left that Janet had not been killed by a prowler.

When the police arrived they were very sympathetic. But then, Chet told his story well.

"I couldn't sleep. I came out here to the couch so that I shouldn't disturb my wife. I guess I finally dozed off. Maybe she screamed, maybe not. But something woke me. Maybe it was the sound of running footsteps on the kitchen floor. Anyway, I did wake up with the feeling that something was wrong. I called out to . . . ((his voice trembled just the right amount)) . . . to Janet. When she didn't answer I went into the bedroom. She was lying there . . . I don't know whether I shook her or not . . . I think I did . . . but I don't know."

It went very well, Chet thought.

A plain-clothes man who seemed to be in charge asked, "Did you see anyone else? Anyone in the hall or kitchen?"

"No. I wish I had. Lord, I wish I had. I'd like to get my hands around the throat of whoever's done this . . . and choke out his life as . . ." Chet broke down, for the benefit of those watching. He had decided beforehand not to claim that he had followed the intruder into the kitchen. A description of a mythical man might lead to a slip-up, if he had to repeat his story too many times. And it was better too, he

thought, to let the police find the broken glass and cut screen door, without his pointing them out.

"Sergeant. Come and look at this," a voice called from the doorway.

The plain-clothes man went out followed by a man in uniform, leaving Chet alone with Dr. Bennet, who was searching in his bag for some pills. Chet closed his eyes. He did not want to talk to the doctor. He also did not want his eyes to follow the police and, perhaps, betray him. But he listened to the men as they examined the broken pane of glass in the kitchen door. He wished that he could hear what they were saying, but they kept their voices low.

In a couple of days it would all be over. He would be free. He would sell the house and get something back for the five years of deprivation to make mortgage payments. Perhaps he might even have a little money left from Janet's insurance policy, if he were careful in his selection of a coffin.

"Mr Hale," the sergeant said. Chet opened his eyes.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to ask you to come down to police headquarters with us. There are a few more questions we have to ask you."

"Are you arresting me?"

"We're holding you on suspicion of murder."

On the ride down to the police station Chet wanted to ask what he had done wrong. He had planned so carefully, during all those long sleepless nights. How could they suspect? But he still hoped to bluff it out, so he kept silent. He must not let them see he was worried.

At the station they fingerprinted him, and took away his watch, his belt, and the things that were in his pockets. Then they let him call his lawyer.

"Phil, this is Chet Hale."

"Oh . . . Chet." Phil sounded sleepy and annoyed. Chet could imagine him looking out at the still-dark morning and yawning.

"Janet's dead."

"Good heavens," Phil said, suddenly wide awake. "I only saw her yesterday."

"I'm still numb about the whole thing. I can't believe she's really dead." He refrained from adding "at last".

"Can I help you at all, Chet? Make arrangements for the funeral or anything."

"You can get me out of jail. The police think I killed her."

"That's ridiculous. I'll be right over. Don't get upset. I'll have you out within an hour."

Chet sat alone in the cell they had given him, trying to believe that Phil really would get him out. But around his heart he felt the same smothering feeling that had trapped him earlier this morning.

"Hale, your lawyer is here now." A tall, though pudgy policeman glared as he unlocked the cell door. Chet followed the policeman out to the main desk where Phil was waiting.

"See? Nothing to worry about. I told you I'd get you out."

"On bail?"

"No. For good. Some over-zealous sergeant thought the screen and glass looked as though they'd been broken from the inside. But I convinced them that the murderer must have kicked the broken glass out when he left. Besides, I told them I could produce twenty witnesses to testify to your notoriously money-grabbing nature." Phil smiled as if he'd made a joke.

"Sorry about this," the desk sergeant said, emptying out a bag on the table in front of Chet. "Will you please sign a receipt for your things?"

"What's my money hungry nature have to do with it?" Chet asked, as he put on his wristwatch.

"I told them you'd never kill Janet just before she was due to inherit all that money. Not when her Aunt Harriet's will directs that if Janet dies before the estate is settled the money will go to charity."

Shock showed on Chet's sharp face.

"I'm sorry about the inheritance, Chet. But there's nothing we can do about it. Janet's murderer cost you half a million dollars."

"Janet was going to inherit half a million dollars from her Aunt Harriet?" Chet said slowly.

"Yes. Didn't you know about it?"

There was a sudden silence in the room, as the desk sergeant and two patrolmen waited for Chet's answer.

"No. I didn't know."

"I'm afraid we shall have to hold you after all, Mr. Hale," the desk sergeant said.

Wearily Chet took off his watch again, and put it back on the table with the pile of things from the bag.

Half a million dollars, he thought. So Janet *had* one more surprise for me after all.

BREAKNECK CRAG

RICHARD SULLIVAN

Illustrated by Vera Jarman

THE WIND was blowing strong and a curlew was crying. Speckman was running now, leaping from grass tuft to grass tuft, clutching his glasses to his face, afraid the wind would whip them away and blind him, afraid of falling into the bright green bogs. All he could see was the bleak top of the moor—black patches of bareness, yellow grass hummocks and the green bogs. Among them black water oozed and trickled, stained with prismatic colours like oil.

All he had to do, he had thought, was walk over the moor, down into the dale and on the other side and he'd be at his hotel before dark. But he misread the map and went up the wrong valley, thinking he was two miles further west. The valley was narrow and deep and at first it was sheltered and almost warm. A beck poured white down it. All he heard then was the water pouring into pools or falling over rocks. As he got higher the ground by the beck got wetter and he climbed above it, traversing the mountainside as he climbed. The mountain was almost sheer. There, all he heard was the wind.

He crossed the beck near its headwaters on the flat of the plateau and struck south by the compass, going deeper into the wrong moor. Ahead the ground always looked solid and grassy but as the horizon came a few feet nearer it broke up into the green bogs and the black-watered streams. Where the ground was bare, the moor was black and pitted, the earth standing up in spikes. He thought it must be peat.

He was afraid to stand on the grass tufts too long in case they sank and as soon as he landed on one he jumped off it, wildly scouring the ground ahead for a landing place and panicking if he were delayed, teetering, for a few seconds. He ran harder. He ran into the wind which roared in his open mouth and shot hard, cold pellets of rain at him. Then on the horizon he saw another moor and came out on the edge of a crag. Below him was a house like a castle.

He took off his pack on the hard ground near the edge of the crag and ate, scarcely chewing, just swallowing the food into his stomach. He sat on his right boot, his leg buckled under him, and ate biscuits and

cheese, snorting as he tried to breathe, still panting, through his mouth. The full March moon was already above the mountain across the valley, shining through breaks in the cloud.

He worked to the edge of the crag and down into the valley. He saw the house clearly. It was five storeys high, it was battlemented, and on one side was a black castellated tower. The doors and windows were arched. He walked towards it until he came to an outcrop of rock. He was trembling at the knees with fatigue and rather than walk around the rock he squatted down and jumped, supporting himself on his right arm. But instead of jarring on hard, dry ground, his feet and legs and then his whole body sank into coldness and wet and he couldn't breathe and the moon was dark and wavy as it is when it's seen through water. A huge animal was lolling towards him, running clumsily like an ape on all fours. It had two heads.

* * *

"I shouldn't have thought this was a case for London," the local police Inspector said.

"Dr. Speckman was a very important man," Chief Superintendent Ballard said, standing where the body had been found and looking across the lake. The lake was a mile long and about two hundred yards wide. Across it the mountainside was planted with fir trees. Behind the policemen was the crag on top of which Dr. Speckman had rested. The crag was about two hundred feet high and at its foot were fifty odd feet of scree and fallen rock.

"We've had five deaths in the past eighty years at this spot," Backhouse, the local Inspector, persisted. "We've never called in London before."

"None of them accounted for?"

"Misadventure," Backhouse said, annoyed. "Fell off the crag."

"Verified?"

"What else could have happened?" Backhouse said. "They all had bad head injuries like Speckman."

"He didn't have much of a head left," Bolland said, turning and looking up the black face of the crag.

"Neither did the others, sir."

"But if he'd fallen off there," Bolland said, pointing up, "you'd expect other injuries as well, wouldn't you?"

"You'd expect so," Backhouse agreed, turning and looking up

"Unless he fell straight on his head."

"And why were his lungs full of mud?"

"The mud's from the middle of the lake, sir," Detective Sergeant Potter said.

"It's a very old reservoir this, isn't it?" Bolland asked.

"Completed in 1892, sir," Backhouse answered.

"Let's have a look at the dam."

"It's what they call an earth dam, sir," Potter explained. "They dig a trench and fill it with concrete up to ground level, then they continue upwards with a core of clay and ordinary earth banked on either side of it."

"Thank you, Potter," Bolland said.

There was a path across the dam and a granite wall on the upstream side. Downstream, the dam sloped down in two stages, interrupted by a level strip which Potter said was called the berm. A small flock of sheep grazed the slopes of the dam. When they heard the men, the sheep looked up and trotted away, stiff legged and jolting, the clegs of dirt clicking in their fleeces, and then stopped and grazed again. Half way over the dam there was a gate in the wall and a cast-iron bridge leading from it to a tower standing out of the water.

"What's that?" Bolland asked, pointing at the tower.

"The valve shaft, sir," Potter said.

On the other side of the dam was the pine forest: up-valley the water curved around the mountain: downstream the valley opened out, the stream being a tributary of a bigger stream flowing east.

"Nothing much here," Bolland said.

"What was Speckman doing up here, any road?" Backhouse asked.

"On holiday," Bolland said.

"What kind of a man was he, then?" Backhouse went on.

"Ask Potter here," Bolland said. "He knows everything."

"He was a bacteriologist, sir," Potter said. "Very hush-hush business. Worked for the Ministry of Defence."

They walked back off the dam. The wind still blew strong and cold but it had cleared the sky of clouds.

"I think we'll take a look on top of the cliff," Bolland said. "We needn't keep you, though, Inspector. If you'll just give us one man to wait below."

"Just as you say, sir," Backhouse said, "but we have gone over the crag very carefully."

"I don't doubt you have, Inspector," Bolland said, "but I'd just like to go over it myself."

"Just as you say, sir."

"What kind of country is it up there?"

"Very wild, sir," Backhouse said. "There's nothing there but the moss."

"Moss?"

"It's our local name for marsh, sir."

"And nobody lives there?"

"Nobody even goes there," Backhouse said, amused. "I can't think what Speckman wanted there at all."

"Probably he got lost," Bolland said.

It was dusk when they got to the top of the crag and almost dark when they'd finished looking about. The moon came up over the pine forest and shone down on the black water of the reservoir. As it did so, the house that Speckman had seen began to form, at first shimmeringly and then more solidly until it stood firm and real-looking and there was no trace of the water or the dam. The original beck showed on the valley floor and a road crossed it by a bridge and followed it downstream. On a flat stretch of ground near the stream were twelve rectangular holes, standing out sharp and black in the moonlight.

An animal came out of the house and rolled on its back on the lawn. Bolland focused the glasses on it, caught the focus for a moment and then blurred it through excitement and nervously readjusted the lenses.

"The bloody thing's got two heads," he said.

They clambered down the side of the crag, cut across the lower end of the scree and down towards the house. Suddenly Potter, who was in the lead, stopped and turned back, floundering as though wading through water.

"The water's still here," he said.

"Of course it is," Bolland shouted, "do you think it's evaporated or something?"

They stood panting on the edge of the lake. The house had vanished again and the local CID man ran up. "You all right, sir?" he said.

"Didn't you see anything?" Bolland asked him.

"No, sir."

"Nothing odd?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"This is very strange, Potter," Bolland said. "We can't both be off

our heads.

Next day frogmen began diving from a punt in mid-lake. They started about noon and by dusk they'd found nothing but thick mud.

"All right," Bollard said. "We'll give it one more try. Send the rest of the men back with the punt," he said to Backhouse. "We'll keep two men here. Give them a bit of a breather first."

"Just as you say, sir, but I still think it was a trick of the moonlight," Backhouse insisted.

"I only hope you're right," Bollard said. "That's all I can say. Potter, you get up on the cliff again and see what happens. Take the walkie-talkie and keep in contact."

"Right, sir."

"This is the damnedest case I've ever been on," Bollard said to himself.

The frogmen waded out through the reeds, ungainly and flat-footed, and then submerged in deeper water, their big torches showing as diffused yellow circles expanding and contracting under the black water. Waves broke off pieces of light which then went out.

Bollard and Backhouse watched the light moving to the centre of the lake. Potter, on the crag, watched the frogmen swimming towards the dark house and the animal which squatted against the house wall, waiting for them.

Through the glasses he saw the frogmen slowly getting nearer, lying horizontal in the air, their feet steadily driving them forward. He saw the big air cylinders on their backs. Fish jerked away from them like nervous birds. The animal hopped forward into the centre of the lawn and crouched like a hunter, looking up with both heads.

The men on the bank saw the lights dip and then they heard Potter shouting from the top of the crag. They heard his voice twice at the same time: once shouting loudly from the crag, once small and crackling over the walkie-talkie. Then the surface of the water boiled up in a cauliflower head which continued upwards on a stalk of water before smacking loudly back into the lake. A shock wave washed about their knees, coating them with soft bottomside mud. It was very quiet and very cold. Potter had stopped shouting. The water surged up again in a bubbling hump, not so high this time, but the whole surface of the lake was moving, waves clashing with counter waves, and the moonlight all shattered.

As the frogmen got nearer, the animal crouched lower. The men split

up, beginning to search, and one of them circled towards it. It was poised and bunched up and Potter was shouting from the top of the crag. Backhouse and Bollard looked up and saw him faintly in the moonlight, standing on the crag edge shouting to warn the men who were fathoms deep and couldn't hear him anyway. The animal sprang and caught the leading frogman, tearing his head away from his body and throwing both parts aside. The body floated backwards, somersaulting slowly, and puffs of what looked like black smoke billowed from the neck. Then it turned and went for the other man with a quick, shambling, hopping gait like an ape. It sprang at him, caught him and dragged him down, biting at him, tearing and ripping with its fore and hind legs until the body was shredded and then discarded.

The animal squatted on its haunches and lifted its two heads. There was no sound except the disturbed water and an owl hooting as it hunted down-valley. Then the whole thing faded and he was looking down at the reservoir and the up-gush of mud and water under which the animal howled silently at the moon.



"Well, at least we know what happened to Speckman," Potter said, sitting in front of Bolland's desk.

"We can surmise," Bolland corrected. "We don't know." He stood looking out of his office window, his hands behind his back. "What kind of power can do that to a man?"

"I don't know, sir," Potter said. "But look how it could impose images on the brain which the eye obviously couldn't see."

"But only from the top of the cliff."

"Maybe, sir, but the power was there."

"Why only from the cliff, though?"

"That I don't know, sir," Potter said, "but it might be something to do with being too near the water. I mean, the water was so obviously real and familiar, the brain might refuse to accept images of anything else, once you got too close to it."

"It's all very strange," Bolland said. "I don't begin to understand it."

"I think you'll find my theory scientifically acceptable, sir."

"Yes, yes, Potter, but I didn't mean that," Bolland said. "I'm out of my depth here. There's nothing tangible about it."

"I believe you *can* make an arrest of a kind, sir, if that's what you mean."

"An arrest?" Bolland said, looking over his shoulder.

"Only of a kind, sir. There could be no trial or anything like that."

"I thought you wanted the water drained and the place dug up?"

"I do, sir. The water's not fit for drinking now, anyway," Potter said. "Not after what's happened."

"I lost two good men down there," Bolland said, looking out of the window again.

"I know, sir, I'm sorry about that."

"You're a cold man, Potter."

"No, sir, I really am sorry."

Bolland turned away from the window. "You're very young to be a D.S." he said.

"Well, yes, I *have* been lucky, sir."

"But you think you know what we'd find down there?"

"Yes, sir. I have all the facts here." Potter held up a buff coloured file and then put it back on his knees.

"All right, all right," Bolland said wearily, sitting down at his desk.

"But try not to make it sound like a thesis for your Ph.D."

"Well, sir," Potter began, opening the file and sorting through it,

"as I see it, it all revolves around the family who owned the valley before the dam was built."

"And if you can keep it in the realms of probability," Bolland said, "I'd be very grateful."

"Yes, of course, sir," Potter said. "Well, sir, as I was saying the valley was owned by a family called Kinder. One of these local mystery families, sir," he said, looking up. "Skeletons in the family cupboard and that sort of thing. As far as I can trace they lived there, in that house, for just over two hundred years."

Bolland took one of his stomach pills but said nothing.

"What is remarkable, sir, is they had a bad reputation all that time and all that time they had the *same* bad reputation. The local people thought they kept something locked up in the house, sir."

"Local opinion always thinks the worst, Potter. You should know that."

"Yes, sir, but in this case the opinion persisted for over two hundred years."

"And what did local opinion think they kept there?"

"Well, they didn't know, sir. They made some pretty awful guesses, though," Potter said, paging through his file. "The Devil was the hot favourite. Then something called a boggart. And demons of various kinds. One theory was the family couldn't die. They just got older and older until they got so old and hideous the younger ones locked them up in the cellar."

"A bit overcrowded in the end, wasn't it?"

"The theory was wrong, sir," Potter said seriously, leafing through his file. He took out a single sheet of paper. "The house itself was built in the seventeenth century. Here's a photostat of a sketch of it. You'll notice it tallies exactly with the house we saw." He handed the paper across to Bolland who looked at it, nodded, and put it down in front of him. "But in fact the house was demolished in 1892. In March, 1892, to be exact. Shall I go on, sir?"

"Please do."

"There's an interesting story here," Potter went on, handing another piece of paper across the desk. "If you went into every room in the house and hung a white cloth in every window and then went outside and looked up, you'd see at least *three* windows without cloths in them."

"That's a very common story," Bolland said. "I've heard of it myself

at least six times."

"In this case, sir, it was true."

"It probably was in the other cases as well," Bolland said. "Go on."

"But the rooms were found," Potter persisted, "when the house was demolished. I gather they were little more than cavities in the walls, sir."

"I don't seriously doubt the secret rooms, Potter."

"No, sir, but in one of them they found a skeleton."

"A skeleton?"

"On a bed of straw, sir."

"No doors?"

"There must have been a concealed door of some kind, but the demolition team would have destroyed that."

"Where did you learn all this?"

"This particular bit, sir, I got from the local police records." He searched through his file again. "Here's a copy of it, sir," he said, handing the report over and sitting back again. "The remains were human and the case was treated as murder. The victim probably died of starvation. No one was ever brought to trial."

Bolland read the paper Potter gave him and then put it on top of the others. He rubbed his chin and then stroked his temple. He was getting old and he would have been retiring soon, he was very upset over the two dead policemen, and he didn't feel up to all this.

"As you see, sir," Potter went on, "the skeleton was that of a dwarf. The kind they call a giant dwarf. I think that's what our animal is, sir. A human dwarf."

"Which lives under water?"

"I think it must be technically dead, sir."

"And it has two heads?"

"No, sir. One head." Potter wrote on a piece of paper and pushed it across the desk. "I can't rightly pronounce it, but that's the medical term for it."

Bolland picked up the paper. On it was written ENCEPHALO-MENINGOCELE.

"It means hernia of the brain, sir."

"But we saw two heads."

"We saw one head, sir, with the brains hanging out. That's what it means—protusion of both brain and meninges through a cranial fissure," he said, reading from his file. "Just like ordinary hernia."

"This is all very well, Potter," Bollard said wearily, "but what exactly do you expect to find down there?"

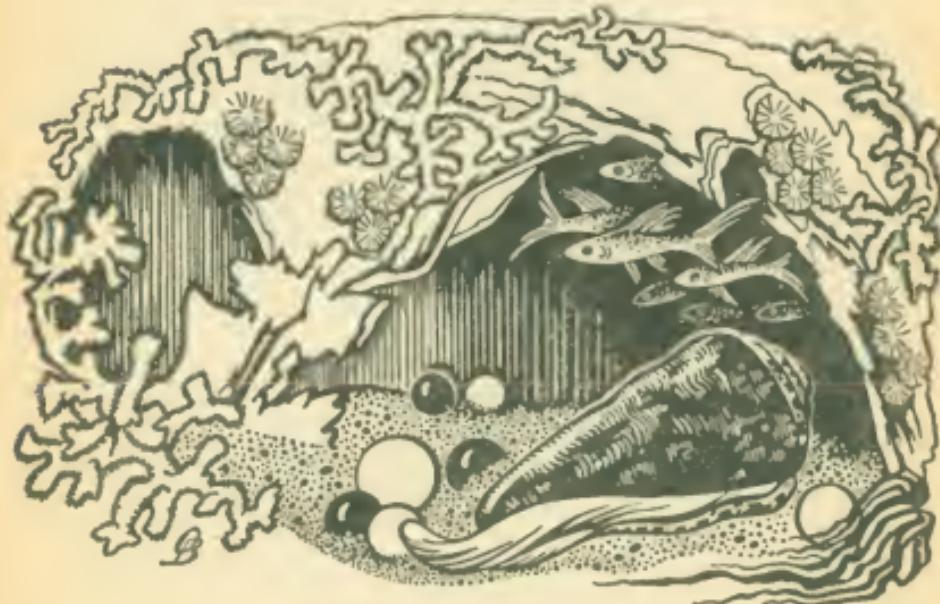
"Skeletons, sir."

"The remains were given a proper burial," Bollard said, picking up the report. "It says so here."

"There must have been a recessive gene in the male line," Potter went on, "which threw up dwarfs every generation or so. That's what they kept locked up there, sir. And you remember the twelve holes near the house? I think that's where they buried them."

"What, twelve of them?"

"We were lucky we only saw one, sir."



"GET ME OUT OF HERE"

DOROTHY B. BENNETT

She was chairbound, rocking, but now she was beginning to feel stiff—a sure sign that life was coming back into her old body.

FTERNALLY I sit here chairbound, rocking, rocking, forever rocking. I'm sick of it, get me out. For month after long month I rock and wait for release that never comes. The long silent nights are the worst; not cold or uncomfortable, just bored. Not once out of this chair for aeons—get me out.

We were happy enough, Roger and I, until he won the pools; an amount that we couldn't believe, and scarcely knew what to do with: but eventually Roger threw up his business as a taxidermist and I gave up my job in the library. We bought this house; the money was divided between us. A nice enough house actually, but it was Roger's choice. To me there seemed too much glass, it's one of those see-through houses, the big lounge has a window front and back, I feel like a goldfish in a bowl, particularly since Roger stuffed me and left me to rock.

With nothing to do, we got fed up with each other, I spent more time at seances—I'm a spiritualist of sorts—he spent more time and money drinking. Perhaps I nagged. One night when I came back late—I'd been the medium that night—and he snapped and I snapped back and I saw his eyes turn mad as he leaped at me and I woke up in this chair; I don't know how much later.

I didn't realise for some minutes what he'd done; I didn't even know I was dead. I just looked at myself in the mirror opposite and wondered. I knew I didn't look quite right somehow, but I couldn't make out what was wrong. When I realised—I'd seen lots of the jobs he'd done on birds and animals of course—I couldn't believe it until I tried to move.

He hadn't made a really good job of it; he never does of anything. But it's good enough to deceive the neighbours and tradesmen. We hadn't been here long enough to get intimate with any, so we don't get many callers, but I see the milkman look in at me and nod pleasantly, and the baker, waves. Roger has told them that I had a fall followed by a nervous breakdown, so they all sympathize. Silly, isn't it, at first I

used to try to smile and return their waves.

Worst of all is that Roger didn't separate me body from soul. I'm earthbound in entirety, my soul can't float away. Foolish, isn't it, to be tied to this chair. And Roger is puzzled, he doesn't know whether I'm here or gone; I think from his mutterings that he thinks I come and go as I like to mock him.

He's always been a one for gadgetry, he'd already fixed up this electric motor to rock this chair, as if I'm doing it. Rock, rock all through the day, then it's switched off with the lights and I stay still all through the long nights. Roger keeps coming over to me to make endearing remarks, and I can sense that it's partly a show for the neighbours who may glance into the window and partly because he's trying to get in touch with me in case I'm still here in spirit. He's not sure and that's his torment.

Then he goes out and gets drunk and comes back and pleads with me to return and asks my forgiveness; all with the light on and the curtains open. "Oh, that poor couple and how devoted to her he is and how he waits on her. What a trial for her and what a cross he has to bear."

Wireless on first thing in the morning and then the T.V. until it goes off so nobody knows whether it's us talking when they're at the door.

He hasn't made a good job of me I can see in the full length mirror.

I wouldn't be any good in a peep-show or in Madame Tussauds, I haven't the perfection of finish, the milk and white complexion, the hair-gloss or eye-sparkle, but I suppose I'm as good as he could make me. It must have been a messy job for him, I wonder what he did with the oddments that were left over?

But that isn't what's worrying him, although it may have done at the time. Now, it's whether I'm sucking his soul from him so that he'll finish half-dead like me or whether I'll take his spirit from him eventually and he'll be dispossessed, become a disembodied spirit. He knows I'm fairly well advanced—or rather, I was—in the mechanics of spirit installations, transformations of souls. Oh, he's worried now; and deathly afraid. He pleads with me in the light to remain as I am and leave him as he is; and he's afraid to stay with me in the dark.

If you could hear him before he switches the light off and quickly slams the door and locks it from the outside—pleas, regrets, prayers even: sometimes he shrieks that I'm robbing him of his innermost being. A joke that, eh, considering my weightlessness. He says sometimes I seem only half-formed, blurred, only partly here, or partly gone.

An embryo. He says sometimes I am palely, wanly fluorescent. That I am an elemental, only half-finished; that from him, indeed. I am supernatural, half here and half in hell; I'm an unearthly abomination and am trying to suck him into my vacuum.

And he's right, so right. I am trying, trying damned hard. I didn't think I'd got a cat in hell's chance until a few minutes ago when the T.V. reported that he'd been arrested at the Albany Hotel. They didn't mention his name, he won't give that, but his picture is there, so they'll soon be here. I bet there'll be a proper shemozzle then, quite frankly I don't know what will happen. You'll soon hear, I expect, there's bound to be a sensation; unless they hush it up as not in the public interest.

What happened is that he walked up to the front door and they didn't open automatically as they should do. They're electronically controlled, that is, the two half sides should slide apart to make way for an approaching solid body. They didn't, so he had to push them, and a detective waiting for some suspect in the hotel hall took more than a passing interest. Roger was half-shot and made a fight of it. The detective explained things to a superior—they don't encourage fights in the hall of the Albany—and the superior demanded demonstrations.

He got them. Roger, proud of the sensation he was causing, approached the doors again and again. No motion. They opened well enough when others approached, even a seven stone waitress—Roger is fourteen stone.

Roger suddenly realised it meant he was no longer a solid body; he's becoming etherialised, a wraith, a mist. He went berserk and they had to put him in a straight jacket.

That's what they'll have to do for me soon if something doesn't happen. For I'm still chairbound, still rocking, but I'm getting stiff, a sure sign that life is coming back to this old haybag of a body—and soul. Come get me out of here.



Toni has an assignment in East Berlin this time and finds herself having to cheat both West German and Russian Secret Police—no simple or safe matter. But Toni Blake is not looking for safety or security—she is adventure bound in a great personal cause—that of her young brother's future life and health.

Meet her on this occasion dressed as a heavily veiled mourner escorting a coffin through to West Berlin . . . with a red rose the key to success or failure.

RED ROSE IN THE COFFIN

DERWENT VALE

Illustrated by Vera Jarman

PRING in St. James's Park is like spring anywhere else in England. It is not unique, but it shares that uniqueness, which is the English spring—a time of greenness, a sudden goldenness of daffodils, a pale smile of sunshine and an exuberant singing in every tree. In St. James's Park, of course, there are also many varied and elaborate courtships amongst ducks, pelicans, geese, swans and other water birds and a lot of stylish suits, ensembles, hats and so on paraded around the lake.

Toni loved St. James's Park and she loved it best in spring so there she was, unescorted, looking very elegant in her new suit, strolling towards Buckingham Palace and being highly intrigued by the antics of the ducks on the lake and by the gaiety of spring fashions on the paths around it.

When a young man in a smart lightweight grey suit, bowler hat and carrying an immaculately rolled umbrella over his shoulder as a Cavalier might have carried his unsheathed rapier appeared at her side and adjusted his step to hers, she wasn't particularly surprised. This sometimes happened—that or some more specious approach.

She glanced up coolly into her unsolicited escort's face and saw a

pleasantly guileless expression, an innocently tentative smile and just a hint of wariness in a pair of brown eyes. Not an expert picker up of unconsidered female trifles, she decided. More like somebody with a mission, like one of those Jehovah's Witnesses, who sometimes came to her cottage down in Rotherhithe and read the scriptures on the doorstep, whilst the bleak wind from the Thames blew the pages of the bible with heathenish ferocity.

"Miss Blake—forgive me for pushing myself on you like this!"

"Do I know you?" asked Toni. "I suppose I must if you know my name, but—"

"No, unfortunately! We haven't met before. I've been following you—all the way from Rotherhithe."

"How interesting!" said Toni coolly. "I suppose you had a reason?"

"Yes, indeed! My name is Rogerson—Bill Rogerson. I'm a sort of civil servant. Humdrum sort of job, you know."

Toni looked at him quizzically. That was some sort of euphemism, she knew, and this young man was not so innocuous as he looked. He was acting a part and acting it well. He had plainly and smoothly established himself as the escort of a pretty young girl strolling in the park. All so innocent and ordinary.

"Mr. Rogerson. I don't believe you are anything of the sort. Civil service, perhaps, but humdrum—no!"

"Oh really, Miss Blake!"

"Better call me Toni—Bill. It will sound better to anyone passing by, who may overhear. It will make your little act more realistic," said Toni mischievously.

He smiled a little dubiously, but still maintained his pose of the impeccably correct escort.

"They told me you were clever and direct, Toni." Then ruefully, "I didn't expect to be caught out so quickly, however."

"You'll have to prove your bona fides, you know," she bantered.

"Why yes. Of course. It is as you have guessed—an approach not likely to attract attention. Ostensibly we are two people taking a walk in the spring sunshine." Then abruptly, he asked, "Would you care to go into East Berlin and escort out a coffin? Through to West Berlin."

"Not really!" said Toni decisively. "But do go on."

"We thought you might be interested, after that F.O. business. Omar Khayyam you remember."

"I might have guessed."

"It's a simple job, Toni. The gentleman in the coffin will ostensibly be your deceased father. You have a permit to bring his body out of East Berlin, for interment in West Germany—in Celle to be precise. The gentleman in the coffin, however, will be very much alive."

"You expect the Vopos at Checkpoint Charlie to be very co-operative? I mean they will just bow their heads and allow us to pass—just like that?"

"Well—yes. You see it is not quite so blatant as all that."

They were now approaching the Palace and the Guards were being paraded and changed with the usual musical accompaniments and the Victoria Memorial was all a-flutter with cameras and gay headscarves.

"Do you wish to see the Guards, Toni?" asked Bill. "Maybe we should . . ."

"Maybe we shouldn't!" laughed Toni. "With spring in the air a young man's fancy lightly turns—surely not to marching soldiers!"

He grimaced at her. "Then we'll walk round the lake. Now as I was saying . . ."

"No, Bill, an ardent young man would suggest a quiet seat somewhere in order to indulge in romantic, springlike fantasies."

Again that dubious smile.

"I am being amateurish," he murmured wryly.

"Naïve, perhaps," Toni laughed.

They found a seat with its back to Birdcage Walk with a lot of staccato noises from the Wellington Barracks to submerge their quiet voices.

"Do I understand the gentleman in the coffin is defecting to the West?" asked Toni.

"Quite correct. He is."

"Has he actually a daughter in West Germany?"

"Yes."

"Then why doesn't she escort her father's coffin from East Germany?"

"She hasn't seen her father for sixteen years, and as he deserted her mother to go to the East she has no particular affection for him and no particular desire to see him again, dead or alive. She actually believes he is dead. We dare not tell her the truth of the matter. Besides we need somebody who might have to cope with a possible emergency."

"I thought there might be a catch in it," said Toni sceptically. "Perhaps you had better start at the beginning. Incidentally, somebody has

a wonderful trust in my discretion to think up this very unorthodox way of enlisting my help in what is obviously a top secret operation."

"Well, yes, but we do know sufficient about you to know you can be trusted. Can you think of a better approach? An invitation to some secret room in Whitehall? Agents knocking at your door at midnight?"

"You have made your point, Bill. Now the facts."

Pelicans glowed pinkly on the lake, daffodils rivalled the patches of sunlight amongst the trees, in Birdcage Walk the Guards marched away to the Palace with a rhythmic beat of highly polished boots, a child screeched in ecstasy on a swing in the children's playground; East Germany, coffin, Vopos, Grepos, Bepos, the grotesque Berlin Wall and the bristling watchfulness at Checkpoint Charlie all seemed parts of a gothic nightmare out of Grimm or Wagner.

"Let's start with Doktor Paul Gisenius, a brilliant biologist, who went over to the Russians, about sixteen years ago, under the mistaken impression that his discoveries in Cytology—something to do with cells and chromosomes—would be more readily accepted and of more practical value in a Communist country than in a Capitalist one. He was something of an idealist."

"And since?"

"Disillusionment. The Russians have compelled him to apply his knowledge to bacterial warfare in recent years. When this happened he quietly sought contact with the West. His first tentative approach was to a member of a British trade mission two years ago. Since then agents have been in touch with him, but no feasible plan has been found for getting him out. He is too carefully watched."

"And isn't he still?"

"No—at least as far as we know he isn't. A few days ago he came to East Berlin for a conference and quite by chance ran into his brother, who, by the way, he greatly resembles. On the Potsdamer Platz. In a café or something. The brother had lived in East Berlin since 1948 and has had no desire to escape like so many East Berliners, since the Wall. He was quite content to work at some ordinary job. He appears to have been a dull, friendless sort of fellow, if anything, a little shiftless, moving from one post to another—clerical work, I believe—and from one room to another. However, he and Doktor Gisenius went off and had a few drinks together, then returned to Doktor Gisenius's hotel for a talk about old times. As you might expect the talking went on until the early hours, then tragedy! The brother had a heart attack.

It took Doktor Gisenius about five seconds to discover his brother was dead and he was in the act of rushing to the bell push to summon help when a daring idea struck him. He examined his brother's face and his own in a mirror, he compared builds and so on and came to the conclusion he could pull off a stupendous bluff. Well, the upshot of it was he changed clothes with his brother down to the last item of underwear, then he slipped quietly out of the hotel by a back way and went to his brother's room somewhere in the Mitte district."

"And he got away with it?"

"Apparently so. The East Berlin papers reported the sudden death from heart failure of Doktor Gisenius in a hotel room. In the meantime Gisenius left his brother's room and went to another district and adopted an assumed name. He left money, packed his brother's few belongings and just quietly disappeared. However, he got in touch with us—he knew how—and suggested we arranged to substitute him for his brother's body in the coffin at the funeral parlour . . ."

"But how can you get the coffin into West Berlin?" interjected Toni.

"Doktor Gisenius had made it a stipulation of his working for the Russians that in the event of his death his body would be returned to West Germany for internment in the family grave at Celle in Hanover. A request has been sent to the West German authorities for relations to come into East Berlin for the body."

"It seems incredible that the East Germans did not investigate the death of such an eminent man more carefully," said Toni doubtfully.

"Look at it objectively, Toni. What grounds for suspicion were there? A man dies in a hotel room, a doctor examines the body, maybe a post mortem discloses a coronary thrombosis, all the man's possessions on his person and in the room point to one person—Doktor Gisenius. The dead man's associates—probably not well acquainted with him on this occasion, since it was a conference of delegates from widely scattered regions—would, no doubt, attribute differences in his features to the distortions caused by his final agony. It's a hundred to one nobody suspected a thing."

"What about finger prints, dental work and so on?"

"Nobody has troubled to make such a detailed examination. That's what makes us so sure nothing has been suspected."

"The coffin is sure to be examined before being allowed to pass into West Berlin."

"Oh we can leave the make-up of Doktor Gisenius to the undertaker.

He'll make a convincing job of it, I assure you. He has a son in West Berlin and had it not been for the family business he would have joined him long ago."

"And my part?"

"That of the daughter. We know you can speak German fluently, but that isn't the main reason. I won't disguise the fact that there is danger—a remote possibility that the Russians are leading us up the garden path, hoping to recover Doktor Gisenius and perhaps catching one of our top agents at the same time. If that were so it would be necessary for somebody with a high degree of intelligence to out-wit them."

"Surely, Bill, you do not believe anybody could pull a thing like that off if the other side were so alert to the scheme?"

"Well, some could. You perhaps," said Bill with a disarming smile. "But really, there is every indication *that* is a very remote contingency."

"When do I leave for Germany?"

"Tonight. Tomorrow at 4 p.m. you should pass through Checkpoint Charlie with the hearse driven by one of our men. You go to the funeral parlour, complete some formalities, collect the body and return through Checkpoint Charlie at 8 p.m. The necessary papers will be provided by the commandant of the Mitte district—Colonel Sieckmann. And now, Toni, my aunt has invited us to lunch. She has a rather nice place just beyond Sevenoaks. In the woods on Leith Hill—very secluded sort of place. We could make it in about an hour in my car."

"Auntie will fill in all the gaps, I suppose Bill?" said Toni slightly sardonic.

"Oh rather! Come on Toni, let's move! My car isn't far away and auntie is a stickler for punctuality," he laughed in a sudden burst of exuberance and highly pleased with himself, as Toni could see, at her easy acquiescence to his proposition. Why not? It was an adventure after her own heart.

"Auntie" with a rather nice place just beyond Sevenoaks was surprisingly masculine, and, indeed, provided an excellent lunch for "her" two guests. As a conversationalist "Auntie" was rather overwhelming and more than adamant and expeditious when it came to filling in gaps as a result of which Toni some hours later found herself seated in the embalming room of a funeral parlour in East Berlin.

* * *

The room with its pseudo air of dignity, its hard electric light

diffused from pseudo altar candles, its sickly sweet aroma of incense and embalming fluids, the elaborate jars of cosmetics nauseated her slightly. Under this faint nausea was a stale despondence brought on by her glimpses of Berlin's nightmarish Wall, bleak, massive and oppressive, by the tall skeleton miradors with their guns and search-lights, by Grepos and Vopos like dark and baleful chosen of the Valkyrie, watching her every move.

The mortuary table with its snow white sheet under which lay the mortal remains of Doktor Gisenius's brother added to the blackness of her mood.

The young West Berliner who had driven the hearse was standing by the table smoking a fat chubby cigar and occasionally casting glances of appraisal in Toni's direction. The undertaker, a thin ascetic looking man with a long, lugubrious face sat by Toni, drinking schnapps from a small glass. Both Toni and Peter Koelbel, the driver of the hearse, had refused the undertaker's schnapps and the nearly full bottle stood somewhat incongruously on the edge of the white sheet over the embalming table.

Toni, now Fraulein Ursula Gisenius as far as the East German Democratic Republic was concerned, was in deep black and veiled. She felt dowdy and dusty and confined.

"Herr Hanke?" she said turning to the undertaker.

"Fraulein?"

"Have you any doubts about the success of this thing?"

"None, Fraulein Gisenius. The body will be placed in the casket in a few moments. Shortly the Vopos will come to inspect it. Then we substitute Doktor Gisenius . . ."

"And what about . . . ?" asked Toni nodding perfunctorily towards the embalming table.

"My dear young lady," said Herr Hanke with one of his rare thin smiles. "I am an undertaker!"

Peter Koelbel grinned at Toni and getting no response muttered sardonically, "Probably two in one box, eh Herr Hanke?"

Hanke accepted this as a possibly helpful suggestion and seriously agreed: "I have considered that." Peter winked at Toni, who could hardly repress a smile this time. "There is a well concealed air hole for Doktor Gisenius," Hanke added as an afterthought to his previous reference to the substitution of Doktor Gisenius for his brother's body in the coffin. "Whilst I put the body in its casket, Fraulein, there is coffee

in my office. My wife has prepared it. She will attend to your needs."

"Thank you!" said Toni. "And Herr Koelbel?"

"He must help me, I am afraid. I dare not trust my assistants when Doktor Gisenius is substituted."

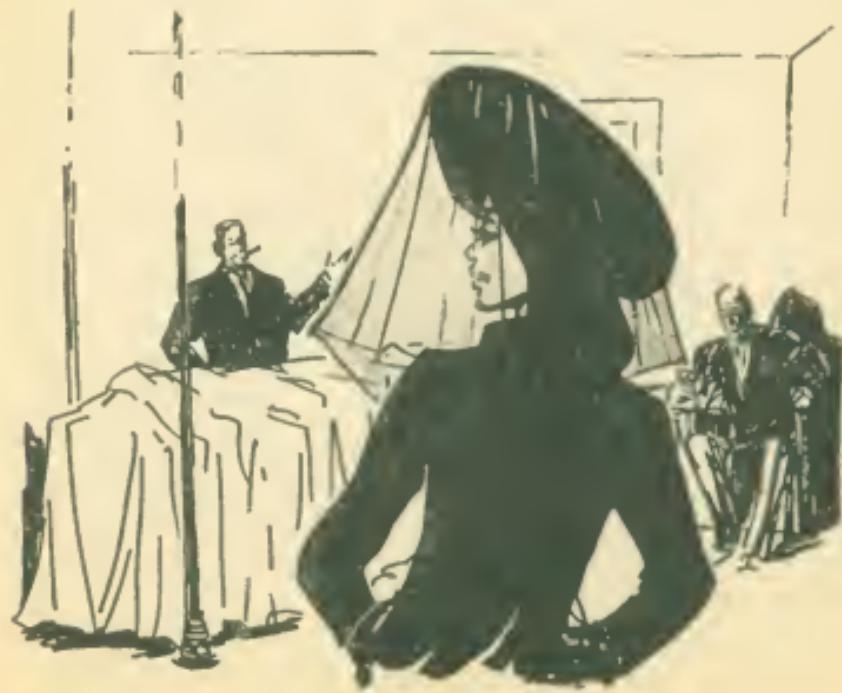
Frau Hanke greeted Toni coldly with, "It will mean seven years, perhaps more, perhaps life, if he is caught and it is just not worth it," but her coffee was excellent and there was "Kranzler" chocolate cake to go with it. "My son sends it," she explained. "The coffee too. We cannot get such luxuries in East Berlin."

"There is no cake to equal it," said Toni. She knew Kranzler's coffee shop on the Kurfurstendamm which was as renowned as the Café Royal in Paris. "You are fortunate to have so considerate a son."

"Yes," said Frau Hanke shortly, though obviously mollified. "I have nothing against you personally, you understand, Fraulein. I am frightened a little, that is all."

"I understand," said Toni sympathetically.

"It is that Colonel Sieckmann. I do not trust him. I have an instinct. He looks everywhere with cold eyes and he smiles too much."



Half-an-hour later Toni more fully understood Frau Hanke's pre-sentiments when Colonel Sieckmann accompanied by a young lieutenant of Vopos arrived with the promised permits. The colonel was a heavily built, blond, blue-eyed Saxon, unremittingly jovial and as watchful as a big blond cat at a mousehole, behind the smiling exterior. Toni caught his swift, flattering assessment of her face and figure in his face, before the careless, jolly Saxon character assumed its prerogatives in smiling blue eyes and smiling sensuous mouth.

"Honoured, Fraulein!" he smiled on being introduced to Toni by Herr Hanke. He kissed her hand, clicked his jack boot heels and gracefully bent his big blond head.

"This is a pleasure, Colonel," Toni murmured. "I hope all the formalities are concluded for your sake as for mine. This must be a tedious business for you."

"Dear lady, I find it less tedious now," he said gallantly.

"Then . . . ?"

"Alas! There is a slight hitch!"

"Yes?" asked Toni, suddenly apprehensive.

"A formality, Fraulein. Because of a small request from a high government official you will not be able to go through Checkpoint Charlie until tomorrow morning."

"I see," said Toni and noted dismay on Hanke's face. "May I enquire the reason?"

"A friend of the late Doktor Gisenius wishes to pay his last respects at the barrier."

"He is?"

"Oh names mean nothing, Fraulein. He is a very important personage. He does not wish to advertise his presence in East Berlin. For diplomatic reasons."

"Of course," Toni murmured. "It is understandable. At what time, then, may we leave?"

"You may leave at 6 a.m. to be at Checkpoint Charlie at 6.45 a.m. I regret, also, one other small imposition. There must be no flowers."

"But, Colonel!" Herr Hanke expostulated. "A few flowers to show regard for the dead. In the coffin perhaps?"

"My dear Herr Hanke," smiled Sieckmann. "Flowers were not permitted for Doktor Gartner's funeral but two days ago in the Saint Sophia Cemetery. That is, of course, with the exception of one red rosebud from the President, which, as you know perhaps, is a very

special tribute to demonstrate the President's deep regret and a token of the high regard in which he held the deceased."

"I did not know," said Herr Hanke.

"The rosebud and the President's card with his signature, placed on the breast of the deceased by the President in person. He makes no ceremony of this little act of reverence, usually performing it incognito, at some unspecified time."

He said this so smilingly and with just that faint inflexion of voice calculated to dispel any hope that Toni might have that this signal honour would be conferred on Doktor Gisenius. As if to emphasize this he added, "Doktor Gisenius was, of course, brilliant in his field of endeavour, but I do not recall that he was—shall we say?—a personal friend of the President."

"No," said Toni slowly and thoughtfully, aware of the slight irony in the Colonel's tone and sensing that something, somewhere, somehow had gone wrong. Without doubt, Sieckmann was indulging in a mild form of baiting. A cat with a mouse—a big blond cat with a little black mouse. Did he suspect her of being a British agent? She thought quickly and saw a move the Colonel had not contemplated which it was in her power to make. A spoiling move only, she realized, and really not very adroit, but, at least, it would temporarily disconcert this too confident colonel of Vopos.

"No, Colonel, that is true. My father was not a personal friend of the President, but many years ago when he was a district leader of the resistance against Hitler and the Nazis he was instrumental in saving the President's life on one occasion. Oh, I don't suppose much significance would be attached to it now. My mother mentioned it once or twice. No doubt the President will have forgotten the incident."

She noted, with satisfaction, the quick change of expression in Sieckmann's eyes—a sudden, tiny doubt or a little jolt to his brash complacency. Would he check on her outrageous lie? Surely he would not dare to!

"No, I do not suppose the President would remember," said Sieckmann carefully. "He was saved from the Gestapo so many times."

When he and his lieutenant had left, Toni turned excitedly to the gloomy undertaker, now more glum than ever. "Herr Hanke! We have a chance!"

"They suspect, Fraulein," he said despondently. "It is all an elaborate trap. What chance is there?"

"He is right, Fraulein," agreed Koelbel. "I saw it in his face, the Saxon pig. He was playing with us."

Then Toni explained her plan and as she proceeded, bright-eyed with excitement and devilry, their mood changed also, their faces lighted up and even Herr Hanke managed a brief, thin, melancholy smile.

"Fraulein, it is genius!" laughed Koelbel. "What a joke! Those dumb Vopos!"

"Yes, what a joke," said Toni, "but not yet awhile, Herr Koelbel—for you and Herr Hanke."

"The watch-towers, the floodlights, the electric trip wires, which fire off red and green rockets, the concrete bunkers—what sort of madness do you contemplate?" wailed Frau Hanke.

"My dear," said Herr Hanke patting his wife affectionately and reassuringly on the arm, "the Vopos know me. They see me often amongst their watch-towers, their concrete and their barbed wire. You might say I am part of their landscape. And if they become too inquisitive I shall merely suggest they are missing a good programme on the T.V. from West Berlin. You see they have smuggled in an illicit battery set and all the time they watch programmes from the West. They know I know and a word from me to the S.S.D.* and they are in trouble—serious trouble. The Vopos will leave us in peace, I assure you!"

"Let's go," said Peter Koelbel.

"Why not?" said Herr Hanke picking up his bottle of Schnapps. "This we'll need for we have much hard work ahead."

"Goodbye and good luck!" said Herr Hanke next morning as the hearse began its journey to Checkpoint Charlie. Frau Hanke's pale, strained face stared up at Toni and there was fear and commiseration in her eyes. "God be with you!" she whispered. Toni smiled reassuringly. Words would have been superfluous.

There was a dank mist from the river making the street lights pallid and ghostly and figures without definition and voices dull and without resonance. Would the S.S.D. at the barrier be taken in by her ruse? It was such an old, old trick—as old as Troy and perhaps older—yet it succeeded often still. Direct attention from the thing you are concealing by some bizarre thing or some outrageous action and the odds were the thing concealed would not be looked for—like a great outrageous, inexplicable wooden horse, which concealed from the Trojans the Greek warriors within it.

* Secret Police.

At Checkpoint Charlie Vopos and Grepos, their dark green and dark blue uniforms reduced to sombre blackness by the harsh lighting, watched the hearse draw slowly towards the barrier and to Toni it seemed their expressions were grimly sardonic as if they were thinking "*This is an old one!*" Then she was aware of Colonel Sieckmann amongst the silent Vopos, all smiling affability and bonhomie and with him two civilians, one of them so obviously Russian by his Mongol features and dark skin.

"S.S.D. and M.K.V." * whispered Toni's companion as he brought the hearse to a standstill. "We are, indeed, honoured!"

"Good morning, Fraulein Gisenius!" welcomed the Colonel far too cordially. "May I present Professor Pyaytakov, who has come to pay his last respects." He did not introduce the other civilian, who stood in the background tentatively biting the nail of his forefinger.

Professor Pyaytakov, my eye and Betty Martin! decided Toni. The man radiated an aura of cold cynicism and dark imperturbability. A secret policeman without doubt.

Toni nodded coolly and received a blank scrutiny in return.

"Your men would perhaps take out the coffin, Colonel?" Toni requested. "It is not screwed down as we anticipated this of course."

"Of course!" said Sieckmann, clicking heels and bowing. He issued orders and two Vopos immediately ran to the rear of the vehicle and dragged the coffin out of it on to the road. They then stood back awaiting further instructions.

"You notice, Colonel—no flowers," said Toni, though had the Colonel been a little less aware of his own prominence in this little drama at Checkpoint Charlie and more perceptive of the nuances of tone and expression in the other actors in the drama he might have noticed a tiny note of satire in Toni's voice. The M.K.V. man noticed, however, and he looked at her steadily for a second or two. Toni returned his look with as much haughty contempt in her look as she could manage, without having any particular emotion about his dark, sinister, little man, except perhaps a slight uneasiness.

The man reacted to the look as Toni hoped he would. For a fleeting moment his eyes became wary and then slightly surprised.

The S.S.D. also reacted, though Toni's look was not directed at him, and he too looked surprised as if well aware suddenly of disharmony in his calculations.

* Russian Secret Police.

"Raise the lid!" Sieckmann ordered.

The Vopos obeyed and Colonel Sieckmann stepped up to the coffin and stared silently at the face of the man within it. Then he stood back and stared up at Toni with blank incredulity on his face, all his superficial joviality gone and in its place a stark dismay.

"Well Colonel?" snapped the so-called Professor Pyaytakov. The implication behind his peremptoriness was blatant.

"Sir—sir—I think you had better look for yourself—" said Sieckmann hesitantly.

The other stepped forward, impatiently shouldering the Colonel out of the way as he did so for the latter seemed rooted to the spot.

For a long time the M.K.V. man stood motionless, staring in grim silence at what he saw in the coffin. Then he turned slowly and faced Colonel Sieckmann and the S.S.D. man.

"Colonel Sieckmann," he said icily, "a guard of honour would have been more fitting."

The S.S.D. man moved quickly towards the coffin and he too stared into it without speaking.

"Undoubtedly," he said at last. "Colonel Sieckmann this is an occasion of great solemnity." It was not a statement of fact: it was a condemnation.

"Indeed. I concur, sir!" said the Colonel, his eyes full of apprehension as if he had premonition of disaster.

Four hundred yards away the flags of the Free World hung limply on their standards, brilliantly illuminated in the area of the wide empty, space between East and West. Four hundred yards, thought Toni. Shall we be allowed to cross that blank, bright space?

"You may go, Fraulein. I am happy to have had this opportunity of paying my last respects to your honoured parent," said "Professor Pyaytakov" flatly.

Colonel Sieckmann issued orders to the waiting Vopos and the coffin was closed and replaced in the hearse. The barrier was raised. Toni nodded perfunctorily to the three men at the side of the hearse. All three bowed unsmilingly as the hearse moved away. The Vopos at the barrier saluted.

They were under the arcs of No Man's Land and it was over.

There were no more hindrances—a routine check at the West Berlin barrier of Checkpoint Charlie—and then the streets of West Berlin gay and cheerful in the early morning light. A military jeep had been await-

ing them at the barrier to lead the way, but Toni had expected this and eventually they pulled into the underground garage of a large block of offices.

Before Toni could alight Bill Rogerson was at the door of the hearse, his face alight with excitement and congratulation.

"You pulled it off, Toni! Thank God! We were in one hell of a dilemma. We didn't think you would!"

"You didn't think we would!" Toni exclaimed incredulously. "Why you said . . ."

"I know Toni! I know! But an agent in East Berlin got out a message early this morning. He had heard the Vopos knew very well what we were up to. We could not warn you and neither could he for you were under very close surveillance." Suddenly he was all contrition. "Toni, you don't think we would have sent you had we known! Everything seemed absolutely safe. But then it appears our chap was wrong. You are here all safe and sound, so he must have been misinformed."

He helped her from the hearse. Men in civilian clothes were in the meantime taking out the coffin. Suddenly one exclaimed, "Bill! There's something wrong! There really is a corpse in the coffin!"

Bill Rogerson looked at Toni incredulously. Toni almost laughed at the stricken look in his eyes. "Toni!" he gasped.

"That is Doktor Gisenius's brother."

"His—his—brother? You—you left Doktor Gisenius!"

"Doktor Gisenius drove the hearse, Bill. He's just behind you now," said Toni, enjoying Bill's stupefaction.

Bill whirled round like some large sized marionette whose strings had been too energetically manipulated.

"I am delighted to be with you, Herr Rogerson. You are Herr Rogerson, I presume, who, I was assured, would meet me in West Berlin!"

"Why yes, sir! Forgive me for—for—Excuse me, sir! I must know what happened!" He turned pleadingly to Toni again. "Toni, for heaven's sake what goes on? How is it they let you through?"

"I realized the Vopos were only playing with us. The easiest way for them to get Doktor Gisenius was to wait until we had made the substitution so we didn't make the substitution. Doktor Gisenius changed places with the driver—with Peter Koelbel. Peter assured me he would get back all right, on his West German passport."

"But Toni, it's impossible! They surely looked at your driver's papers—at him also!"

"No, they only looked in the coffin, in which was a very obviously dead man."

"The more reason to suspect the driver of being Doktor Gisenius!"

"No. They thought the dead man in the coffin was Doktor Gisenius. There are strong resemblances, you know."

"Yes, we knew that, but the Vopos aren't fools. Colonel Sieckmann is no fool!"

"No, they are not fools. But, you see, Bill the President has a little trick of honouring dead associates—those he thought highly of. He calls unexpectedly at the funeral parlour or the dead man's home or he even stops the hearse en route to the cemetery for a last look at his dead friend and then he places a red rosebud with his personal card inscribed with his signature on the dead man's breast. Nobody would dare to interfere with the funeral arrangements after seeing the red rose and card in the coffin. It is a sure indication of the President's recognition of the dead man's identity and the deep regard in which he had held him."

"You don't mean to tell me the President actually . . .?"

"There *is* a red rose here sir! And a card!" interposed one of the civilians standing by the open coffin.

"Of course not, Bill!" said Toni. "Herr Hanke and Peter Koelbel took the red rose and the card from the grave of a Doktor Gartner, last night. Doktor Gartner, a personal friend of the President was buried two days ago in the St. Sophia cemetery. The President had honoured him with the red rose etcetera."

"But the St. Sophia cemetery is full of traps, blockhouses and so on! It was a well-known escape route to the West. There were tunnels from some of the larger tombs and of course the cemetery wall adjoins West Berlin."

"Herr Hanke knew, of course, but he is often seen in the cemetery. He's an undertaker you know! Apart from that he told me the Vopos in St. Sophia Cemetery were too busy watching the T.V. at the time!"

"Oh lor, Toni! What a lark. You're joking about the T.V. of course. And what a bluff."

"Yes, a bluff, Bill. The most patent in the world. A very old bluff. Troy and the Wooden Horse you know, Bill."

"Yes?" said Bill vaguely. Then his face brightened with enlightenment. Oh Lord yes—jolly good, Toni!"

Some time later in a hotel room from the window of which she could



see the shattered spire of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, Toni told herself I'm on the Continent so I might just as well buy myself an Easter bonnet in Paris—and a few things to go with it. And I will arrange to meet Timothy and have a dinner at the Ritz or somewhere and Timothy will tell me about the exhibition he is planning . . .

When Timothy saw her purchase he said, "Why, Toni, this is marvelous. I'll paint you in that dark green thing. It's simply delightful."

"Dark green thing, Timothy!" she cried in horror. "Why it's . . . it's a Dior creation! I bought it so that I could have dinner with you at the Ritz or maybe at Maxim's or—or somewhere, *not* to be painted in!"

Over their filets de sole Persane Toni looked across at her brother and said, "Timothy do you really like this green dress? You keep scowling at it—that's why I ask."

"Wonderful, Toni!" he said. "You look lovely. But Toni dear, why the red rose? It's wrong. Yellow—or an orchid, maybe. No I couldn't paint a red rose against that green."

"Well, I have an affection for red roses at the moment, Timothy—."

She smiled secretly. She could not tell Timothy of the gay little box containing one red rose, which the air hostess on her plane from Templehof had politely handed to her with, "From a gentleman, who regrets he was not able to see you off, Miss Blake."

CIVIC PRIDE

ROY S. MILLER

Illustrated by Buster

NED THWAITES was a deck hand on the cargo steamer *Ocean Prince*. He was a medium sized, dark, taciturn man, about forty years of age. His particular friend was Sam Swetman, another taciturn individual about the same age. But Sam was a much bigger man, running to fat, with a moon face and thinning sandy hair. In their off-watch periods they would stand together, smoking and leaning over the rail. They seldom spoke, for their only interest was the ship's business and there was little new to talk about.

When the *Prince* docked at Liverpool, Ned suffered an accident. A cargo sling broke, crushing his foot, and he spent his leave in the seamen's hospital. Sam visited him there, painfully nervous in such unfamiliar surroundings. He sat on the edge of the chair and placed a small packet on the bed. "Brought some tobacco for you, Ned. 'Ow's the foot?"

"Thanks, Sam," said Ned. "Not too bad. It don't 'urt any more."

"When you goin' to be out of 'ere, mate?"

Ned was irritated. "'Ow do I know? They tell yer nothin' 'ere."

"Well, you'd better 'urry it up," said Sam. "The bosun says we're sailin' Monday."

"Then you'll be goin' without me," said Ned. "It's a dead cert I shan't be fit by then."

The ward sister now appeared, ringing a handbell. "Visiting hours are over," she said, briskly. "All visitors out, please." Sam stood up and Ned said: "Hang on a minute, Sam, I want you to do somethin' for me." He reached into his locker. "Give this to my old lady. There's twenty quid in that envelope. It's nineteen Union Street. You can get there by bus in an hour. Tell 'er what's 'appened to me and I'll see 'er as soon as I can. And stop 'er comin' 'ere. She's got the rheumatics and she don't go out much. If you forget the number, ask at The Bull. They'll tell you where she lives."

It was Monday afternoon before Sam could find the time to visit Union Street, and he realised, as he boarded the bus, that he would be

pressed for time. The street lamps were already alight when Sam found it. The doors of The Bull beckoned invitingly, but Sam put temptation away. The *Prince* wouldn't wait for him if he was adrift. Number nineteen was by a street lamp, and Sam walked up the short path and banged the knocker of the door. There was a confused shuffling from within, and the door opened cautiously. An elderly woman stood there, leaning against the doorpost and blinking sleepily at him. Her wispy grey hair had escaped from its pins and her stained blouse was fastened on the wrong buttons.

"Wodger want?" she said, and belched.

Sam was shocked. Ned's old lady was drunk. There was no doubt about it. He thrust the envelope at her. "Ned asked me to give you this. 'E's in 'ospital with a busted foot." Sam was anxious to get the interview over as soon as possible. A drunken seaman he could understand and deal with. A drunken woman was a new experience and he was embarrassed.

Ned's old lady reached for the envelope: "Ted? Wot's 'e bin up to now?"



"Not Ted!" said Sam, "Ned! 'E's in 'ospital, like I said. There's twenty quid there. Look, Ma," he said, hurriedly, "I got to go. My ship sails in an hour."

"Orl right, sailor," said the woman. "Thanksh for comin'," and she giggled. The only thing she had understood was the twenty pounds. Why Ted, who was in prison, should send her money by a sailor, was something she did not want to know. She clutched the envelope tightly. The main thing was to spend the money quickly in case there had been a mistake.

On the bus back to the docks, Sam was saying over and over to himself: "Ned shoulda' told me! 'E shoulda' told me!"

When Ned was fit to leave hospital, he was told by the Company's agent to join the *Ocean Queen* at Cardiff. "You'll have to look slippy," said the agent. "She's sailing in the morning."

Ned decided to risk a hurried visit to his mother at Union Street. He was glad it was dark when he arrived for he had no time to spare chatting to the many people who knew him.

His mother kissed him fondly and then noticed that he was limping. "What's the matter with your foot?" she asked, sharply.

"Some machinery fell on it when we docked. I've been in 'ospital, Ma. You know that! Sam told you. You goin' barmy or somethin'?"

"Sam? Who's Sam? I didn't know anything about you being in hospital."

Ned dropped his bag in the hall and stared at her. "Sam Swetman, my oppo. You've 'eard me speak of Sam. I asked him to call 'ere a fortnight ago to tell you what 'ad 'appened to me. I gave him an envelope with twenty quid in, for you. Sam *must* 'ave come. Are you sure you ain't forgotten, Ma?"

Mrs Twaithes said tartly: "Of course I haven't. Would I be likely to forget a thing like that?"

Ned said, bitterly: "So 'e didn't come after all. Couldn't even do *that* for me. And you didn't even know I was in 'ospital." He kissed her withered cheek. "All right, Ma, don't you worry. I'll give you some money before I go. Now I got to get a move on. Got to be in Cardiff tomorrow mornin' to join the *Ocean Queen*. Just give me some clean things and then I'll be off."

A few minutes after Ned had gone, Mrs Saunders, the next door neighbour, opened the street door and called: "Are you there, dear? I thought I heard Ned's voice. Is he home?"

"Come on in, Clara," said Mrs Thwaites. "Ned was here but he couldn't stop. He's had to go to Cardiff to join the *Ocean Queen*. Put the kettle on, there's a love, and we'll have some tea."

Mrs Saunders' husband had been a sailor and she understood the ways of seamen. Over cups of tea the two women talked of Ned, the accident to his foot, and his new ship. But Mrs Thwaites did not mention Sam Swetman and the twenty pounds. Clara would never be able to keep such a tit-bit of news to herself, and she didn't want the whole street to know.

Then Mrs Saunders nodded at an envelope tucked behind the clock on the mantelpiece: 'Did you tell Ned about the renumbering?"

"No," said Mrs Thwaites, "I clean forgot. He was only here for a few minutes. I'll get him to do it when he comes home again."

"I've done mine," said the neighbour. "Seems funny to think that after all these years we're now twenty-seven and twenty-nine. It'll take a bit of getting used to. They said at The Bull that it's all this new councillor's doing. Mr James Porter, he calls himself. Got to do something so that we shall remember him, I suppose. If you ask me, I reckon he's made a big mistake, upsetting everybody in the street. What's he want to go interfering for? We liked our street the way it was. You should hear old Mrs Kirby. She's number thirteen now, and she don't like it at all." Mrs Saunders paused for breath and then went on: "You'd better let me do yours, Jane. It's no good waiting for Ned. There's two number nineteens now, and there'll be a mix up with letters."

"It won't bother me," said Mrs Thwaites. "Ned's all I've got and I know where he is. We don't waste money on letters."

When Mrs Thwaites was alone, the possibility that Ned's friend might have called at the wrong house occurred to her. But she dismissed the thought immediately. Everyone in the street knew her and they would have put Sam right. He couldn't have come. Anyway, she could leave it to Ned. He would sort it out.

* * *

In the few months that followed, Ned had plenty of time to think about the missing twenty pounds. He was convinced that Sam, his friend, had robbed him. Sam was always short of money and he had a prodigious thirst. The temptation had been too much. He probably reckoned that he wouldn't meet Ned again for a very long time, if at all.

"But you will, mate!" said Ned, grimly, as he smoked and brooded. "You will! And when that day comes, Sam Swetman, just you look out for yourself."

About a year later, the *Ocean Queen* pushed her blunt, ugly nose into the small Spanish port of Guetaria. Another British ship was there, moored in the stream, evidently ready for sailing. Ned's face cracked in a grim smile as he recognised the *Ocean Prince*.

When they were tied up at the jetty and Ned was free, he changed and went ashore. There was no need to ask where Sam would be. He would be in the wineshop nearest to the steps where the *Prince's* boat was secured.

Sam Swetman, drinking with a couple of friends, heard the doors bang, and saw Ned Thwaites bearing down on him.

"Why, hullo, Ned," he said, heartily, "glad to see you, mate. Saw your ship come in but I didn't know you was on 'er."

Ned wasted no time on civilities. "What 'appened to that twenty quid I gave you for my old lady?"

Sam saw that something was wrong and he answered, warily: "I gave it to er, Ned. On the Monday, the day we sailed."

Ned said: "You're a flamin' liar! She says you never went near 'er."

Sam took a quick look round the bar. About half the seamen present were shipmates of his from the *Prince* and most of them knew Ned. The others could only be from Ned's ship. There were no other Britishers in port. They were all watching and listening with obvious enjoyment.

"Well!" said Ned. "What 'ave you got to say?"

"I gave it to 'er, Ned, honest I did," said Sam, miserably, "but I don't wonder she's forgotten." He paused, swallowed twice, and took the plunge. "She was drunk at the time."

"Now I know you're lyin'," Ned shouted, furiously, and he leaned forward and hit Sam across the face with the back of his hand. An appreciative sigh came from the onlookers.

"'Ere, 'ere," said Sam, rubbing his cheek. "You got no call to do that. I've told you the truth an' I'll tell yer again. Your old woman was drunk."

Ned tried to hit him a second time, but Sam swung backwards and stood up, kicking his chair away.

For the first minute or so, Sam merely tried to protect himself from Ned's flying fists, muttering, "Pack it up, Ned! Get ahold of yerself!"

And then Ned managed to land a hard one flush on Sam's bulbous nose, and Sam's patience went. "All right!" he snarled. "You asked for it," and he let out a tremendous right which caught Ned in the chest and sent him sprawling among the spectators. Quickly they pushed him to his feet: but Ned's knees buckled and he slid to the floor. He was out, cold.

The seamen were disappointed at such a speedy ending to what had promised to be a lively scrap. One said, gloomily: "Is 'ead fetched up against the table. I 'eard it! Pity! 'E was givin' the big feller a real pastin'. Deserved it too, for what 'e said about the little feller's mother." The others nodded their heads in sympathy and glowered at Sam.

Sam stood in the centre of the floor and appealed to them all. "'E started it! 'E 'it me first! I didn't want to fight 'im. 'E's my friend."

"Pore feller!" said the big bosun from the *Queen*. Fancy 'aving you for a friend!"

Sam was thoroughly roused. He couldn't imagine what had happened, but it was clear that Ned thought that he had stolen the twenty pounds. The injustice of this hurt more than the punch on the nose. Ned was a stupid fool: but no more stupid than the bunch of fools he had shipped with. Sam singled out the bosun and said, politely: "You seem to know a lot about it. Would you like to carry on where 'e left off?"

"A real pleasure," said the bosun, standing up and peeling off his coat.

At this moment, one of the seamen left the bosun's table and walked to another table where three firemen from the *Prince* were sitting. Solemnly he took a glass of wine from the table and slowly poured the contents over the biggest fireman's head. The fireman sat quite still and watched him do it.

A split second later, the waterfront dive known as The Heavenly Twins, rocked, as some two dozen British seamen joined in combat. Someone had tucked Ned away safely behind the bar. He had served his purpose in starting the fight. The fat proprietor scuttled out of the back door and across the Square to the Police Station. He shook the Chief of Police, who was sitting on the verandah dozing in the evening sun, and pointed. He was too blown to speak, but the dust and noise across the square told the story for him. A few minutes later, Don Esteban, with half a dozen stalwart civic guards, marched across the Square.

The police chief kicked open the door of The Heavenly Twins, and

roared out; "Silencio!"

No-one took the slightest notice. Four of the contestants had broken off the combat by mutual consent and sat by the wall, licking their wounds. The tables and chairs were matchwood on the floor, and over the ruins the battle swayed back and forth. As Don Esteban watched, two seamen cannoned into the bar counter, sending it over with a crash of bottles. Ned Thwaites crawled dazedly out of the wreckage.

And then Don Esteban did a very foolish thing. He drew his pistol. Perhaps he meant to fire it into the air, but as he pressed the trigger, a chair leg struck his arm and the bullet was deflected. It hit Ned Thwaites who raised a howl of anguish. The shot achieved what Don Esteban's shout had failed to do. Blows were halted in mid-air, and men released each other to turn and stare curiously at the intruders. A strange silence settled on the bar of The Heavenly Twins. Then, as suddenly as the pistol shot, the tension broke. With a roar of rage all the seamen present reached for Don Esteban and his men.

Five minutes later, Don Esteban, his followers, and the fat proprietor, were laid out against the wall. Those that were not unconscious had sufficient sense to pretend to be.

"Well, that just about clears it up, mate," said the big bosun to Sam. "I don't think we've overlooked anyone. We'd better get back aboard and stay there until this little lot blows over." He put out his hand: "So long, Sam. A very enjoyable evening. Don't know as I ever remember a better. Hope the little feller's all right."

"He's O.K.," said Sam. "A couple of your chaps have taken him back to the ship. It's a flesh wound in the shoulder—not serious. Sorry I said what I did about his old lady." The bosun, gently fingering a loose front teeth, nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, you shouldn't 'ave said that. Even if it was true," he added magnanimously.

But for Don Esteban, the set-to in the Heavenly Twins bar might well have been forgotten. The sailors would have had a whip round to pay for the damage and everyone would have been satisfied. Unfortunately, Don Esteban spoilt everything by dying. Someone had cracked the Chief of Police just a little too hard. The following morning, his assistant, a tall young man with very little chin and a large Adam's apple, called on the Captains of the *Ocean Prince* and the *Ocean Queen* and informed them, in halting English, that they must not attempt to leave harbour. "The unfortunate death of Don Esteban must be examined," he added, meaningly.

Captain Forbes of the *Prince* called on his fellow Captain: "A nice mess you've got me into, Thompson. I was all ready to sail. I'm carrying fruit and most of it will be rotten before I see Liverpool."

"Have a drink," said Captain Thompson, "and stop bellyaching! If I were you, I'd slip out tonight. There's a gunboat somewhere about, but I'm told their shooting is very poor, and even your old tub could probably beat them in a straight run. I've got to stop here anyway, but there's no sense in losing your cargo as well. They'll be so pleased that they've still got me that they won't bother about you."

And so, shortly after midnight, the *Ocean Prince* quietly slipped her moorings, and as dawn broke, she was picking her way carefully along the coast, keeping a sharp lookout for the gunboat. Captain Forbes argued that if the gunboat were looking for them, she would be making sweeps out at sea, and by hugging the coast and using the cover of the land, he hoped that his vessel would be less conspicuous. But their luck was out. The *Prince* was still in Spanish waters when the lookout reported the gunboat in sight.

After ten minutes or so, the Mate, who was watching the gunboat through a telescope, said: "She's gaining on us, Sir, and she's signalling."

"Well, what's she saying?"

"She's hoisted P.R.B., Sir."

"Good! That means she doesn't know who we are. Stand by, there'll be more to come."

"She's now put up the letter K, Sir."

"Oh, so he wants us to stop and talk, does he? Well, he can bloody well want! How far are we from the French coast, Mister?"

"I should say another half hour at this speed, Sir."

"Somehow I don't think he'll follow us into French waters," said Forbes. He blew down the voicepipe to the engine room and shouted: "Give us everything you've got, Mac. That gunboat's on our tail and I'm going to make a run for it."

The Mate touched his arm: "She's just signalled, 'You are standing into danger'. What shall I do, Sir? Shall I acknowledge the signal?"

"No!" snapped Forbes. "Let's stall him a bit longer. Can you see anything on the chart? Reefs or shoals? Any sandbanks? Anything suspicious at all?"

The Mate, who had been studying the chart closely, brought it over and spread it out on the table. "Look for yourself, Sir. Clear water all

the way, as far as I can see."

"So it's a trick to get us to stop. Well, it won't work. We'll keep going as we are, Mister Mate."

As he spoke, the *Prince* came up all standing, with the noise of tearing metal and crashing bulkheads, whilst the mast and super-structure quivered and shook from the vibration of the sorely tried engines and the thrashing of the propeller. Forbes, who had been thrown heavily against the forward side of the bridge by the impact, staggered to the wing, and saw, in the clear Mediterranean water, the dark shadow of a sunken wreck under the bows. He shouted to the Mate but his voice was drowned by the roar of the escaping steam from the boilers. He caught the Mate's arm and shouted in his ear: "Sunken wreck! The bastard was right after all. And it wasn't even marked! You can give him the answering pennant now, Mister, and ask for assistance. Get everyone up from below. Those forward bulkheads won't last five minutes."

* * *

Months later, the Spanish Government agreed the value of Don Esteban's loss to the community at 150,000 pesetas. What with this, and the loss of the *Prince* and her cargo, to say nothing of the holdup of the *Queen*, Ned and Sam's quarrel had cost his Company many thousands of pounds.

It was a long time before Ned and Sam saw each other again; and then it was by accident, in the waiting room of the Company's office in Liverpool. It was less dramatic than their former meeting.

"You signin' on Sam?" asked Ned.

"Yes," said Sam. The *Ocean Pride*. Pretty good, they say."

"Do they want another deckhand?" asked Ned. "I'd like to ship with you, Sam."

Sam smiled: "If they won't take you, they won't get me either." Both men knew that a handsome apology had been made and accepted.

A month later, leaning over the rail in the smooth blueness of the Mediterranean, Ned said: "I'd give something to meet the joker who mucked around with the numbers of Union Street. Just two minutes on the deck 'ere would satisfy me. If 'e'd left things alone, you wouldn't 'ave gone to the wrong house and that old faggot wouldn't 'ave 'ad my twenty quid. Old Don Esteban would 'ave bin alive and kickin', and the old *Prince* would still be bashin' 'er way round the seven seas. When

I get back 'ome I'm goin' to find that flamin' perisher, and I'm going ter say to 'im . . ."

"Come on" said Sam. "Four bells. Time to turn to." And as Sam and Ned went on duty, Councillor James Porter, of Mon Répos, a few miles outside Liverpool, was saying to his wife :

"It's a matter of civic pride, Matilda. Take Union Street, for example. Until I took a hand, they were quite willing to muddle along in the old way. Now the Street's been renumbered, and everyone agrees that it's very much better. Funny how obstinate people can be about a simple thing like changing a few numbers. It isn't as if it could possibly do them any harm."



RAW KID

JAMES RAESEL

It was a lot of money for an easy job . . . of course there were risks . . . for if the police stopped him it could mean up to two years . . . but he would never get caught.



"Now, I WON'T allow anyone to push me around ever again," said Nicky half audibly to himself as he walked to his car with confident strides. "My first job and no mistakes! I am set. Louis is behind me, and he's the man to work for."

He had just received his money from Louis for delivering four bags of dagga reefers to Louis' joint in Johannesburg. Louis had taken a personal interest in the matter, had even paid him himself. "Twenty ten rand notes making your two-hundred, check for yourself!" Louis had said as he handed over the roll.

Abel and the boys had looked on expectantly. They had wanted him to check, make a fool of himself, advertise his inexperience, give them a laugh. But he'd been too smart. He knew Louis' reputation; it was well known: Louis *never* paid short! Only a raw kid would ever check a roll of notes Louis handed over. He had just looked at Louis, shoved his jacket aside and stuffed the notes into the back pocket of his jeans. He was no silly kid, no-one would laugh at him.

Lightly he brushed his hand over the thick wad in that back pocket. Two-hundred Rand! A lot of money for an easy job like this! He'd make plenty more! Of course there were risks: if the police had stopped him it could have meant up to two years with all that dagga. The Courts had no mercy on dagga dealers—even on a first conviction. But *he* would never be caught, never be taken. He caressed the automatic in his pocket: no-one would push him around!

He drove in the direction of a filling-station. His hands trembled slightly on the steering-wheel: It had been a strain driving four-hundred miles with that forbidden load in the boot! It had made him tense and explosive, but that was good, like that he'd stand nonsense from no-one. It was as he'd felt the night he left home. His father had first become tearful when he told him he was sick of his mother and their stupid, interfering, law-abiding ways. Then the old man had become aggressive, till he clipped him one. That had made it clear that

he was not going to be bossed anymore. His mother's tears? That was just *her* way of bossing him. He was through with his parents and their type of people, through with their pushing him around.

"Three rand Super and check oil and water", he said to the petrol-jockey, as he stopped his car and got out. Nicky was about twenty, lightly built with bushy blond hair, a bony face and long lean limbs. Tight-fitting jeans covered his legs, and a heavy jacket his torso.

The petrol was poured in, the water and oil checked. Extracting a note from the roll in his back pocket, he gave it to the runner, a chubby round-faced Zulu.

"Here's your change, Boss!" said the boy chirpily about a minute later as he offered Nicky two one-rand notes.

Nicky's anger was immediate. He grabbed the boy by the shirt-front. "Listen, thief," he hissed, "I know all about your tricks. This time you've picked the wrong man to try it on. Just give me the other five rand!"

"But, the Boss gave me only five-rands. I gave the note to Mayana there, he gave me the change, ask him! I am not a thief, Boss!"

"Who is Mayana?"

"The bag-boy Boss, he carries the money, he gives the change".

"Oh, it's him is it?"

He walked to where the frightened runner had pointed out Mayana.

"Listen Mayana, you lousy crook, give me that five rand you are trying to steal from me, or I'll wreck this joint!"

Mayana was older, less easily scared, than the Runner. "No Boss! No Boss!" he said, "You make a mistake. This runner boy he gave me a five rand note. Look! I put it in the front pocket of my cash-bag."

Nicky darted at Mayana and grabbed his shoulders with both hands, squeezing hard. "Forget it!" he said fiercely. "Can it! Don't try this! I'll kill you! All I had on me was ten rand notes, I paid you with one and now you want to short-change me." He shook Mayana violently, "give me my full change or I'll take you apart!" he shouted.

"Leave me Boss, leave me please!" Mayana pleaded, now flustered. "Call my boss and check your money."

A tap on his shoulder made Nicky jerk around, still holding Mayana. He saw a short man, heavy around the middle and bald, before him.

"What's all this?" inquired the new-comer. "Let go of that boy! What's going on?"

"This your garage?" asked Nicky.

"Yes, these boys all work for me."

"Well, it's an old trick they're up to. These thieves are trying to short-change me. I gave them a ten rand note and now they want to give me change for five."

"Well, let's go into this," said the garage owner briskly. "Have you got the numbers of your notes?"

"No, don't be stupid! Who keeps the numbers of notes? I gave him a ten rand note and he knows it. That's all I had on me; ten rand notes. Look!" Nicky took the wad out of his back pocket and flicked the notes. "See!" he said, "all green, all ten rand! I got them just before coming here."

Mayana, now released, rummaged among the notes in his bag. "Look, Boss," he said, "here's my notes, you gave me this last five rand."

Nicky leaned forward as if to inspect the five rand note in Mayana's hand, then quickly snatched it away. "Well," he said as he casually pocketed it and moved to his car, "that puts an end to the argument. I've got my full change now, so you blokes can do what you like!"

Fast for his size, the garage-keeper moved forward and caught him by the arm. "You give that back!" he snapped. "You give that back straightaway!"

Disdainfully Nicky looked at him. "Don't you push me!" he drawled slowly and coldly. "You may think because you own this garage you can do what you like, but if you start pushing me, I'll do you in, that's for sure!"

"You're too light for that, my friend," growled the other. "Just give that note back!"

"You make me!" snarled Nicky and fiercely knocked the garage-keeper's hand from his shoulder.

The garage-keeper lunged at him and they grappled. To and fro they moved, breathing heavily, each trying to throw the other down. Nicky went down first, forced by the other's weight. They struggled wildly on the ground, legs flailing. Realising that the other man was too heavy for him, Nicky extricated himself in a burst of energy, and jumped to his feet. Viciously he kicked at his opponent's head, but eluding the kick, the other man caught Nicky's foot and with a quick jerk brought him down.

They sprang up simultaneously and faced each other once more. Then a loud report sounded as Nicky drew his pistol, aimed with arm

extended, and shot the garage-keeper through the head.

He looked at the dead man, then at the petrol attendants. He lifted his pistol in their direction. "You stay away from me!" he shouted, jumped into his car and drove off.

This was a mess, he reflected: Murder for five rand! But still: they had tried to push him around and *that* he could never allow!

He raced to his hotel. He'd have to get out of the country quickly! Rhodesia, Zambia, then the Congo—a mercenary! Those fellows would ask no questions. If he stayed, he'd get twenty years, or hang.

Arriving at the hotel, he sped up the stairs and rushed into his dingy single-room.

In the half-light he saw someone sitting on the bed. He drew his gun and cursed. How in God's name could the police have got there already?

"Put that away sonny, put that away!"

Nicky recognised Abel, Louis' messenger. "What you want?" he gasped.

"Louis wants you to do another quick job for him, something turned up just after you left. He also told me to give you this," Abel held out a five rand note. "It's a trick he sometimes plays on you kids the first time he pays you. He puts one five rand note in the bundle. The fellow who has the sense to count and catch him out, gets a bonus. So far he's never paid the bonus. You are all too smart to check up on Louis."



THE MILLION POUND CONTRACT

KENNEDY SMITH

Illustrated by Buster



MACKENZIE was a dried up stick of a young man. As he leant against the solid mahogany of an ancient bar, one foot on the brass rail and the rest of his six feet two on the polished top, the dim light from a beer advert. cast long shadows from his features.

Not that they were not long to begin with. His prominent parrot beak stuck out between the two deep grooves that supported his chin. As for his eyes, they were lost somewhere under the shaggy ginger eyebrows and only emerged to check the state of the glass in his hand, a massive knobbly hand. All in all, his face would have reflected a sense of inner calmness, were it not for the occasional involuntary twitch at the corner of the mouth or the slight trembling of the sleeves of his Harris tweed jacket.

It was almost two that afternoon when a rather rotund man with a ready smile and a thin scrape of hair over his almost bald pate bounced across the bar-room floor to where MacKenzie was ensconced.

"I thought I'd find you here, MacKenzie, old boy."

MacKenzie started and swung round to face the newcomer. "Oh, it's you," he growled, his accent betraying his northern home.

"Yes, of course it is. It's me, Ronny Clay. Who did you think it was?" Some of the bonhomie had left the newcomer. "What are you drinking, Colin?" he went on trying to retrieve the situation for in actual fact, these two were old friends of longstanding—well, on and off they were, for their temperaments had clashed before this.

"Ah'll have another Glen Grant, Ronny," MacKenzie suggested relenting a bit.

"What, whisky at this time of day!" But Clay refrained from further comment. He could see the signs rekindled under the bushy eyebrows.

The two men carried their whisky and export to an alcove table in a cosy corner of the room, for although the pub was almost deserted, it was obvious that MacKenzie would open out more in privacy. It was clear that something was troubling him.

"Well, Colin old boy, what's up? Lose a million pounds or something?"

MacKenzie looked up and grinned wryly. "You could say that. Aye, you could say that." But he would say no more.

Clay tried another tack. "I see there's a bit in the Times here about Prof. Petraschen—he's an old colleague of yours, isn't he—they call him the million dollar brain . . ."

"Million pound brain," MacKenzie corrected.

Clay consulted his newspaper again. "By Jove, you're right, Col," and continued to read the article.

Colin MacKenzie's face rarely betrayed any emotion, but now there was some inner struggle taking place. "Listen Ronny"—the other looked up from his newspaper—"we've known each other quite a time now . . ." He paused and licked his lips. The whisky glass trembled.

"Go on, old boy." Clay felt it would all come out now.

"It was your mentioning Prof. Petraschen just now that brought it all back to mind."

A likely story, thought Clay but refrained from commenting. Instead he merely nodded his head.

"You see," MacKenzie went on, "I used to work a lot with Petraschen. We were both under contract to the Universal Computer Company. In fact, it was through U.C.C. that I first met Burt Petraschen."

* * *

It would be last April when I was called into C. J. Coleman's office—you probably know C. J., the managing director of U.C.C. Well, as you can guess, I was astounded that he should even want to see me, for I'd only been working on routine stuff up till then. Indeed, at the time I was working on some shipping schedules for a twelve berth port and had just completed the computor programme. It still had to be tested, but it was hardly top line stuff worthy of a director's attention.

Nevertheless, there I was seated comfortably in a large leather chair drinking some foul sherry and smoking an equally foul cigar. C. J. opened up then and gave me the lowdown on some job he had lined up for me. "I'm afraid it will necessitate you going abroad," the pompous ass said; "Switzerland to be exact."

I nodded my agreement and reluctantly swallowed more of his eight-shilling-a-bottle sherry. The brown paper wad in my other hand had long become defunct.

"You are to become personal assistant to Professor Petraschen who unfortunately is ill at present. You will find him at this address," C. J. tossed over a paper, "one of the best clinics in the world."

I picked up the paper and quickly scanned it. "And what will be my duties, sir." I called him sir for the job looked definitely attractive now. As you know, Petraschen is one of the top, no, *the* top brain in the computer world today.

C. J. continued: "Professor Petraschen has been rather ill for some time now and it is necessary that someone with sufficient technical knowledge should act as his secretary, or rather as his amanuensis. He is unable to write but his brain is perfectly clear and he is most willing to work."

I might say that I was more than a little shocked that the company should be wringing the last drop from someone so ill, no matter how valuable his knowledge might be. I started saying so to C. J. but he brushed my stutters aside.

"I suppose I'd better give you some more background on the situation," he sighed in exasperation, "for I see that you seem to be shocked by our attitude; and if you're shocked now, there's no saying how you will react when you see the man.

"We, in the Universal Computer Company," he continued in his most intolerably egotistic fashion, "recognized the great talents of Professor Petraschen as long ago as 1954 and decided to try and tie him by contract for a period. Unfortunately, from our point of view of course, *he* also recognized his abilities and did a bit of pretty shrewd bargaining with us. The contract, however, was duly witnessed and signed—that's a copy if you wish to examine it—what it says is this." C. J. paused and cleared his throat for an important announcement, important in his eyes: "The Company (that's U.C.C.) agrees to pay the undersigned, B. Petraschen, the sum of one million pounds to be paid in advance for the contract of his services for the following forty years or until his decease, whichever is the sooner."

Old C. J. spoke like an insurance policy but I hardly noticed. He had paused to let the significance of the contract sink in. Prof. Petraschen was contracted for forty years for a million quid in advance. A million quid!

"I believe he meant to enjoy himself whilst he was young," C. J. continued. "We in turn mean to keep him alive until he fulfils his side of the bargain—another twenty-five years."

I just lay back in the leather chair, for the moment speechless, but I can't say I was very taken with the idea myself. I thought of my own contract at home, the one I'd never even bothered to read, and began to wonder how many years I was committed as Petraschen's personal assistant. Twenty-five years, perhaps?

At last I found my voice : "What exactly is he suffering from?"

Coleman hesitated before answering. Perhaps he was deciding just how much more he ought to tell me, for no doubt he could see just how I was accepting or rejecting the situation in its present state. Eventually he said : "He has severe cirrhosis of the liver with considerable amount of lung cancer in an advanced stage."

He turned away from me to show that the interview was at an end and yet somehow I got the impression that there was more to it, that he had not given me the complete story. Even so, the fact that Petraschen was about to pop off after enjoying their million quid cheered me up somewhat—you don't get cirrhosis of the liver through drinking lemonade.

* * *

Two days later, the company plane was touching down at Vevey airport with only me and my luggage on board. I was quickly hustled through the customs and from there led to a Rolls with the U.C.C. crest on the side. They were certainly treating me in style. I'd better check that contract again.

The clinic itself was a very pleasant single storey building extending down three sides of a square. Within the square was an admin. building with a small emergency powerhouse attached. The whole setting was Swiss chaletish enhanced perhaps by the projected eaves of the buildings forming a verandah running round most of the structure.

A small chalet lodge keeper informed the main building of our arrival and I was greeted by the director of the clinic, Herr Doctor Kopftergrassen—I just called him Herr Doctor after the first few attempts. He was virtually the popular concept of a Japanese with his large grey head bobbing up and down in welcome and a face wreathed in smiles to show the finest set of stainless steel teeth I've ever seen.

But appearances can be deceptive for I saw some of his work later and there was no doubt at all as to his ability as a surgeon.

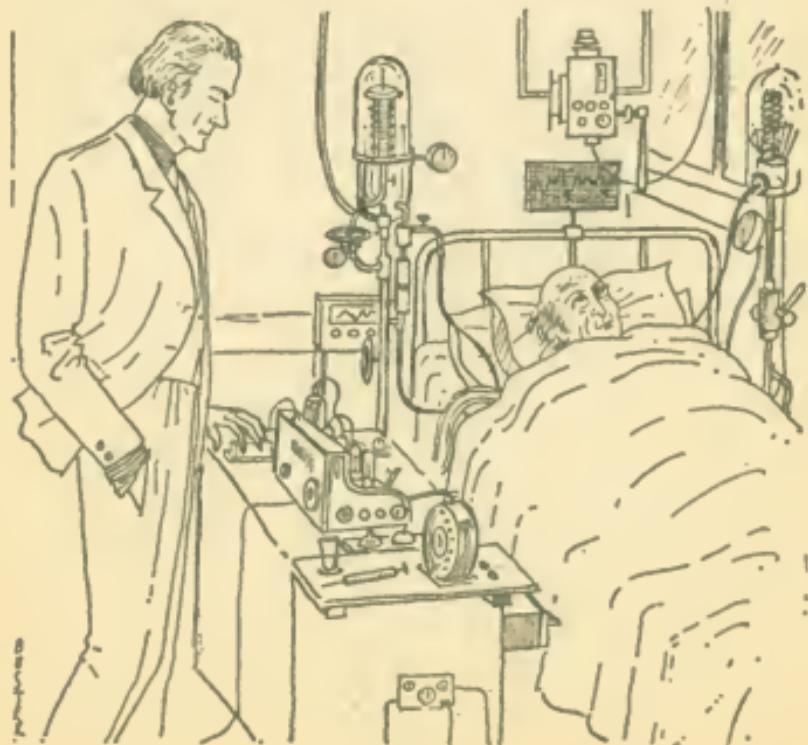
"Of course, you will want to rest, Mr. MacKenzie." He relieved me of a handgrip. "Your quarters are over this way. Follow me, please." He even had the nasal quality of the Japanese. Maybe he was Japanese.

I never ever found out.

My quarters were austere but comfortable enough for all that with even a colour tele. The reception was never very good on that particular set; besides, my French had never been very good either. There were six male doctors in the hospital and one female whom I gather was a biologist. I call them male and female for although we all fed together in a little dining-room, that was all I ever found out about them.

They were singularly uncommunicative even to the point of being rude and even aggressive towards me. Herr Doctor explained this away by saying that there was some disagreement at present with certain policies. Yet, I could not help but feel that the aggression was directed against me, personally, and had nothing to do with internal strife.

Next day, I was taken to meet my mentor, Prof. Petraschen. I had steeled myself for this meeting although luckily I had had very little time to think about it. I don't know what I imagined it would be like but certainly I never expected the situation which greeted my eyes.



Petaschen was lying in a small bed near the window. His form never moved as I entered the room and his eyes remained fixed on the ceiling. This "greeting" did not particularly surprise me. What did surprise me, however, was the vast array of equipment in the room. Since I was to work there, I half expected the desk computer and the card punching machine; even the overhead projector did not seem superfluous for presumably he could not move his head and used the ceiling for all his reading. Nor did the appearance of the man himself shock me. When I got into his visual range he smiled and greeted me cheerfully enough in a peculiar croaking voice: "Do come in, Mr. MacKenzie, and let me look at you." Petraschen's eyes scanned me up and down.

"Good day Professor. I must say you are looking well." Indeed, he did look well. This produced a great silent laugh from Petraschen causing him to draw his lips away from his clenched teeth and even produced a tear or two. An attendant nurse wiped away the tear almost mechanically—so he must be completely paralysed. "I believe you and I are going to be companions for a bit," Petraschen croaked on. "You might as well find your way around this junk," and his rolling eyes indicated what he meant.

I wandered my way between pieces of equipment examining them with feigned interest, for mathematics and not machines, is my life. It was with a great sudden awareness that I realized that half the machines in the room were keeping the man alive. A small double peristaltic pumping unit was, in effect, an artificial heart pumping his life's blood to a synthetic membrane artificial lung which rolled with a drunken motion through some cam arrangement in one corner of the room.

I now recognised an artificial kidney machine, not in operation at that moment, with several other pieces of dormant equipment that were new to me. The integrated set-up was monitored by several chart recorders ticking away on a panel—this one monitored blood pressure; that one, oxygen content of blood—the man was a living machine.

Petaschen saw my face as I returned to the desk beside his bed. "It's shocking, don't you think?" He drew his lips over his clenched teeth once more to give his leering version of a smile. "Of course, you realise that they are simply keeping me alive to use my brain. We might as well get started and give them their money's worth. They keep telling me how much the equipment cost and what with my original contract—you know about that, I expect—they must have spent a bomb on me already."

Again he dissolved into silent mirth with tears streaming down his temples and into his hair before the nurse wiped them away. I think I understood the joke but it hardly raised what you would call a belly laugh.

I sat down at the desk and tried out the various gadgets there. All worked perfectly, an unusual thing in itself.

"Well, what's the current project, then?" the Prof. asked. And so we got down to work on the petroleum company's new refinery and twelve berth port that I had already started.

That first day's work was the greatest strain for me—the continual background slogging of pumps and the hissing of recorders—the Prof. staring at the ceiling most of the time—the annoying fussiness of the nurse although she never altered the controls of the various life machines; I reckon they must have been completely automated.

Nevertheless, Petraschen completed and checked my previous month's work in a mere morning. I was completely deflated and told him so. I expect it gave him considerable pleasure to realise that at least his brain was still functioning as a top class unit.

The following day and thereafter, we were left alone together without the distraction of the nurse. My guess is that either C. J. or Petraschen pleaded the importance of secrecy in our work; Petraschen seemed particularly pleased so I think he was responsible. Anyway, it says a lot for their confidence in their machinery. I remember one day the heart pump failed. There was almost immediately a click and a standby unit came into action as alarm bells sounded faintly in the distance.

Within thirty seconds, three technicians or doctors, I don't know which, were in the room and within one minute the faulty pump had been slipped out of line and replaced with a new one. They had every cause to be confident. Petraschen merely said enigmatically: "If I go, they go," and grinned.

"What's the project for today, then, Colin?" Petraschen and I were on first name terms now.

"Well, Burt, there is this distillation set-up for the separation of six hydrocarbons." We were still working on the refinery project. "We have to use the Ponchon and Savarit method so I have here the enthalpy data, but I'm afraid there's no equilibrium information. Shall we use Raoult's law and combine this into a six dimensional analysis with enthalpy as one dimension . . ." The technical jargon flowed on as we

knocked a relatively simple programme into shape.

At one point, Burt Petraschen broke off and stared at the ceiling for a long period: "It's very cold, Colin, very cold." I lifted a spare blanket and spread it over him even though to me the central heating seemed abominably hot. The movement caught his eye and snapped him back to his former self for he gave a silent chuckle as though amused at some private joke.

It must have been just about then when I started sleeping badly. At first, I put this down to the high altitude for I had headaches with my insomnia. What was more significant, however, was the way in which my thoughts seemed continually occupied with my mentor, Petraschen. I began to wonder what he really thought of all the laboured efforts to keep him alive just to fulfil his million pound contract. At first it seemed to him as one huge joke but as time went on, his spells of pre-occupation grew longer and more frequent. The cold particularly bothered him in spite of, as I said, the hot atmosphere in his room. No doubt, the artificial heart was not keeping his circulation up to scratch.

One afternoon—we did not work in the afternoons—I mentioned the cold to Herr Doctor suggesting that the artificial heart was not doing its job properly. He stared at me as though I were mad and mumbled something about doing what he could. Thereafter, Herr Doctor was noticeably more distant and in spite of his efforts, Petraschen was still cold.

I like to think of my free time as my own; yet somehow I got it into my head that Burt Petraschen was my responsibility and that it was up to me to keep, if not his body, his spirits healthy. I took to paying him social calls in the afternoons with this in mind and after a short period, we became quite close friends on an intellectual plane.

He loved to talk, mainly of the riotous times he had with the million pound down-payment and how the excesses of his living had brought ruin to his body yet leaving his brain as sharp and clear as ever it had been. His first breakdown was cirrhosis of the liver; that was about five years ago. More recently, this lung trouble came to the surface and through operation, one lung was completely removed. Since then it was one thing after another although he refused to talk about his more recent medical history. I think it gave him the horrors. And throughout it all, the infernal cold of his body.

After tiring myself out in the evenings with some private work—I was writing a book of problems at the time—I would drop into bed

and pull the large bolster-type eiderdown over me. In the darkness, I could picture Petraschen lying in his cot, struggling with teeth clenched against the pain and cold of his body. In my brain, this continuous clicking and hissing of nervous recorders and the gentle chug chug, slurp-slurp of the pumps, growing in volume until the great crescendo of sound almost overwhelmed me and I would sit bolt upright in the darkness with sweat trickling down my neck and my pyjama jacket clinging to my back. The thought went through my mind that the heat of Burt's body had been transferred to my own.

It was association of idea, I suppose, but it was then that I began wondering why I was really in that clinic. A source of spare parts? I switched on the light and looked at myself in the mirror. I almost laughed. Me for spare parts? They couldn't have chosen a more decrepit specimen. It was a disquietening thought just the same and after this contract business, I would not put anything past C. J. and his cronies. Needless to say, I didn't get a lot of sleep that night nor for the remainder of the week in spite of a chair under the door handle.

On the Saturday of that same week, quite a remarkable change came over Petraschen. I had never heard a mention of pain from the man, but now his brow was furrowed and his teeth more tightly clenched than ever.

"Colin," he cried when he saw me, "it's maggots . . . maggots . . . I can feel them all over me. Kill them, man, kill them;" and he started moaning in a most peculiar rasping way. I tried to comfort him and laid my hand on his brow, his wet and clammy brow, sticky and clinging like a fillet of fish. The touch soothed him and the morning's work restored his humour. Before I left for lunch he murmured, "Thanks Colin," and his eyes glistened.

I determined to make that afternoon one of my social visits for it seemed that Petraschen needed the company; besides, if anyone knew about any nefarious spare part filching he would. I suppose I could have left there and then but it's part of my heritage to see a job through to its end; or you can put it down to stubbornness, perhaps even stupidity.

Anyway, that afternoon we talked of ethics with me trying to swing the conversation to spare part surgery. He was for none of it, however, for he talked mainly of the sanctity of life and the rights and wrongs of suicide.

"You know, Colin," he said, "if I had the courage and the power

I should be dead by now." While I was puzzling over that one, he added: "What's your attitude to euthanasia, Col?"

I stared at him and murmured some self-righteous thing about living out ones natural lifespan. "*Dum spiro spero . . .*"

"Hope! Hope! There's no hope for me, man," he spat out and closed his eyes.

I got up to leave and I think the sound caught his attention for he opened his eyes once more. "Don't go yet, Col lad." He paused for a moment. "I have a proposition to put to you." I sat down again but avoided his eyes in the embarrassment of the moment.

"Listen, Colin. I want you to kill me." Then seeing my shock: "Put me to rest, to sleep . . . euthanasia . . . call it what you will." There was a long pause. I didn't know what to say and just stared at him. I think my mouth was open. "In that top drawer," he indicated with his eyes, "you will find the key to a deposit box. If you promise to kill me, I'll tell you the bank and the box number. There is an authorization card there too . . ." and he mumbled on about some other technicalities.

Observing my silence, he smiled in his peculiar grim way and said: "Think about it."

I think I would have left at that point, not only his room but the clinic itself. I'm no saint, as you well know, but neither am I a murderer nor an euthanasiast, or whatever it is. His eyes darted up to the ceiling with a blind stare somewhere between stark terror and panic. "Damn them," he hissed, "It's those damned maggots . . . they've got me . . . maggots." His eyes turned to me pleading: "Please, Col, please." My hand returned to the fishlike clamminess of his forehead and soothed him before I fled for the sanctuary of my own room.

What a proposition! My first reaction was to reject it out of hand. Yet, lying wakeful in my bed that night, nagging doubts assailed me. Was it fair to keep the man alive, to keep him to his million pound bargain? On the other hand, I couldn't quit the clinic and go back to U.C.C. to tell C. J. that his big cheese had maggots, and no doubt, if I abandoned the company, C. J. would make sure that I stayed unemployed for the rest of my days; he had hinted as much at that last meeting.

Through the fog of doubts and counterdoubts came the file-rasp cry of "maggots" with the steady beat beat beat of the heart pump which seemed to synchronise with my own heart pump thumping in my ear drums. The sounds kept eddying around my brain and echoed

off into space as I fell down through my mind's fog. Far below, staring up at me from his cot I saw Burt Petraschen, that same look of terror in his eyes that had transfixed me earlier. Falling, falling, nearer and yet no nearer, for each time I seemed about to strike the figure in the bed, it reappeared again just as far away . . . falling faster, each cycle repeatedly faster . . . I hit the cot and woke up screaming to the sound of falling furniture.

The overhead light in my bedroom showed the anxious faces of two of the medical staff. A chair was lying on its side, the chair I had fixed under the door handle. My mind was made up.

Sunday was a rest day for Burt Petraschen and me. I slept late after the ructions of the previous night. My mind was still made up.

I entered Petraschen's room with a brusque, "Good morning, Burt."

He looked slightly puzzled and frowned as I refused to sit down but paced to and fro in the little room available at the foot of the bed. "Well?" he asked.

"I've made my decision, Burt." His face cleared. "I . . . I . . ." My hesitation caused him to frown again. "I just can't do it, Burt." I cut his pleading short. "It's just no good. I know you've had a bit of a raw deal but I have some loyalty to U.C.C. You must have too or you would just refuse to work for them. Can't you ask them for a spell off, or offer to return that money in the safety deposit to cancel the contract?"

"You don't understand, Colin man. I just don't want to go on living." A tear trickled down his temple on to the pillow.

For a time we were both silent, me pacing up and down and him motionless with his eyes closed. Petraschen broke the silence: "Can I make one last appeal, Col, please? Please!"

I nodded curtly.

"Lift the blankets then and see what you're keeping alive." I hesitated a long moment, then made to protest. "Go on man, go on," he cried.

I stepped forward to raise the blankets and stared for a full long minute before I dropped them back in place. Without a word, I turned and strode over to the heart pump placing one hand on the rheostat knob. I turned it hard to the right. The pump raced and in the distance I could hear alarm bells before I returned the control to its original position. As the attendants raced in, I was standing there looking at his calm serene face marred only by a trickle of blood from one nostril.

MacKenzie looked up from his drink avoiding the eyes of his companion.

"It says here, he died from a stroke, old boy," said Clay uneasily.

MacKenzie nodded: "Mmm. The increased pump pressure did it." He swilled down the rest of the amber liquid and played with the empty glass between his two hands before going over to the bar and ordering the same again.

Clay moved uncomfortably searching for something to say: "Much money in the deposit box, Col?"

MacKenzie sipped his drink: "Dunno. He never told me its number."

Again silence.

"It must have been horrible, Col, horrible. Were there . . . maggots, Col? What was under the blankets, Col?"

Colin MacKenzie emptied his glass. "There was nothing, nothing at all."

"No maggots?" Clay sounded disappointed.

MacKenzie looked the other straight in the eye. "Nothing. No body. Nothing but a wire cage and some plastic tubes . . . only a head . . . a million pound brain."



THE CALL OF THE RUNNING TIDE

JUDY CHARD

Illustrated by Carolyn Dinan

WHAT was left of the submarine was inaccessible at high tide, wedged in the reef of rocks which stretched round the mouth of the cove. The conning tower, and part of the deck stood stark against the skyline as the sea receded, rough with barnacles, green with weed, which was crisp and brittle beneath bare feet in the sunshine, slimy when the water covered it—"Like trailing mermaid's hair," Dolly remarked.

To the children it was their private property, their secret refuge, as was the beach itself below Aunt's house on Pengel Point.

Their mother was dead; their father, the Major, was submerged in his Army career, which was his life, his religion, his total absorption.

Aunt tackled the problem of bringing them up by pretending the submarine did not exist and continuing to live the sort of maidenly, secluded life, she had always led.

In trying to adapt themselves to such a life, Tom and Dolly had been thrown inward upon their own resources, storing up within themselves secret, wilful, rebellious feelings. They adopted a general practice of non-communication with the only two grown ups they knew, and a shell of hatred for the world they did not.

They were by nature fanciful and imaginative, highly strung, with a tendency to deceit and exaggeration, which Aunt called fibbing. And the house and environment did nothing to alter their characters, for it was like a museum, full of old junk, mixed up with pieces of exquisite china and furniture.

The family had lived there for generations and nothing was ever thrown away. In this atmosphere of the decaying past everything had a personality of its own.

When the weather was too bad for them to go out of doors they spent their time in the room which had once been the nursery. It had a deal table and slippery horsehair chairs, covered by a layer of dust. The toy cupboards, their doors hanging from broken hinges, held a wealth of ancient toys from past ancestors, and the lead soldiers and

farm animals became characters from the books they had read—Arabian Nights, Hans Andersen, Alice in Wonderland, and the Back of the North Wind.

But all this was only to pass the time until once more they could get out where the everlasting wind blew on their faces, across the green clad cliffs, down the rocks, which held the submarine. Here they came alive, king and queen of their own kingdom, rich with endless games from their vivid imaginations.

The favourite was to pretend they were the original crew of the ship, doomed, as they stood in the sun-dappled, half twilight at the base of the rotting ladder, which led up to the conning tower—waiting until the last moment for the running tide, when they would crawl and slither to safety across the rocks of the reef. The sea then soaking them with spray as little tongues of foam crept up the sand creeks, between the black rocks.

The winter storms tore and battered the wreck, gradually tearing pieces of the metal plates away so that each returning spring there was a little less of the rotting hulk left. Its endless fascination lying in the fact that no grown up ever approached it, did not even know of its existence.



Pengel House stood on a promontory, the beach only accessible by a cliff path. Its nearest neighbour, a mile away, was a building of similar type, which had stood empty for years, until last summer, when it had been bought by the Prison Authority as a home for delinquent boys.

This had brought a spate of letters from Aunt, to Her Majesty the Queen, the Council, and the local Member of Parliament, motivated by her constant fear of prying eyes, intruders and Bolsheviks.

The children ran wild, tanned and weathered like young gypsies, their clothes outmoded, though they were hardly conscious of this, for they never mixed with other children, their education being undertaken by a retired schoolmistress who lived five miles away and came daily by ancient pony and trap.

Miss Bendall had known Aunt since childhood, and although in the latter's opinion, was not quite out of the top drawer, in the absence of any other solution had to be tolerated.

Summer and winter she wore a long tweed skirt and moleskin jacket, her face inches thick in enamel and rouge, for she had been a beauty in her day. She had dyed red hair, surrounding a shining bald spot on the top of her head, which so fascinated Tom that when she bent forward to correct his exercise, he was sorely tempted to challenge Dolly to a game of noughts and crosses on the bare expanse.

The summer holidays were the time they loved best. Long, hot days seemed to stretch endlessly before them, when they swam naked in the bottomless blue of the sea, and lay on the burning sand to dry; until at last, no matter how brightly the sun blazed, they escaped to their secret world within the submarine, with its magic of their own making.

On the lower deck the iron grating, cracked and broken with a jagged hole in the middle, lay scattered with the shale like plates of the batteries, which had burst from their cases. Here Dolly had once slipped and caught her leg. Tom had had to tug with all his strength to get her free, and all the while the running tide dashed itself on the iron hull.

In a way the sea was their enemy, for it submerged the submarine twice daily, and when the water reached the third rung of the metal ladder, they were forced to clamber up into the sunshine. Reluctantly they would return to the housebound world, where Aunt ignored them, and their father, home on one of his rare visits, would shout at them to "Keep your heads up, shoulders back. Stand like men, dammit, not languid lilies!"

They found the boy on a still August day when it seemed as though the sun were motionless, hung like a brass tray in the sky.

After breakfast they had swum and sunbathed, beyond the reef, in the low tide, and then, half tipsy with sun, they climbed the rusty ladder, to creep thankfully into the cool twilit world of the submarine. Dolly had gone first. She gave a little shriek when she saw the pale face, like an open flower, motionless in the depths beneath her. Tom peered over the edge.

"Must be a fish," he said.

Dolly, arrested in her descent, shook her head.

"It's a person, probably a ghost of one of the drowned sailors," she said hopefully.

Warily they climbed down until they stood side by side on the iron grating.

Then they saw it was a boy, not much older than themselves. He lay, half twisted, one leg caught in the jagged edge of iron, his face ghastly in the gloom, his eyes closed. He was breathing in curious little jerks.

"We must wake him up," Dolly said firmly, "get him out of here."

"But he'll tell," Tom said, "he'll tell Aunt. It'll never be our secret place again."

Dolly took hold of the boy's arms and shook him. Beneath her fingers she could feel the bones through the flesh, like a skeleton with no warmth, no life.

The boy opened his eyes, puzzlement and disbelief in them.

"Where the 'ell am I, and who are you?"

Dolly let go his arm. "You're trespassing, you're in our submarine, it's private property. You must go, you've no business here."

The boy tried to move and let out a groan of pain. "It's me leg, it's broke."

"Broken," Dolly corrected, primly, "and it serves you right, you shouldn't be in other people's property."

"I was only 'iding, just for a little while, till they stopped looking for me, then I was going to 'itch a lift to London."

"How did you get to our beach anyway, and who are you hiding from?" Tom asked sternly.

"I'm from the 'Ome, round the cliff," he jerked his thumb vaguely in the direction of land. "Climbed the wall when the fuzz weren't looking. Came down the path. 'Eard them after me, so I runs across to 'ide. Didn't mean no 'arm. Then I slipped on that bloody weed and caught

me leg." He looked down at the twisted limb. "Now I suppose I'll have to give meself up."

Dolly sat on the bottom rung of the ladder, chin in hand, watching him as though he were some curious species of animal.

"You'd better go and tell 'em, they'll have to bring a stretcher or something. Maybe a 'elicopter," he said with sudden animation.

"They wouldn't believe us," Tom said, "they never believe anything we tell them. Aunt and Miss Bendall say our heads are full of fancy. We're awful fibbers. Anyway, we shouldn't be allowed to speak to the people at the Home, they're all Bolsheviks, Aunt said so," he added with finality.

The boy's expression changed. "But you must, I can't get out of here else." There was panic in his voice.

"No," Dolly said with deliberation, "you can't. Everyone'll know about this place then, and it's ours, our secret, private place."

His eyes were round with horror, fear, disbelief, his mouth turned down at the corners as though he were about to cry. "That's murder, bloody murder," he said shrilly.

"No one will know," Tom said with cunning, "I told you, no one will believe us."

As he spoke a finger of water crept under the grating. "Tide's turned. Another hour or two and this place'll be under water, then no one'll know about you."

The boy banged his clenched fists on the grating, his voice rising to a scream, "Get me out, get me out, damn and blast you, bloody murderers..."

Tom looked at him coolly, "Head up, shoulders back. Don't be a languid lily," he mimicked his father.

Dolly folded her arms and looked stern, "We've already told you, we can't, not even if we wanted to."

Tears ran from the boy's eyes, making channels in the dirt of his thin cheeks. "Please," he whimpered, "please, I'll give you anything you want, anything." He brightened momentarily. "there's probably a reward for finding me!"

Dolly wavered. She'd never seen anyone cry before. Only babies cried.

"How old are you?" she asked with interest.

"Fourteen," he sniffed, wiping his nose on the sleeve of his torn jersey. "Wot's that got to do with it, any road?"

"You're too big to cry. And anyway we don't need the money. We're very rich."

A wave broke against the side of the hull.

"Oh Gawd, get me out of here!" he screamed.

Dolly looked at his leg doubtfully. She bent down and clasped it above the knee, giving it a little tug. The boy shouted in agony.

"You see?" she said with unremitting reason, "it's quite impossible."

"Then don't stand talking about it, go and fetch someone," he moaned. His head fell forwards on his chest as he swung into unconsciousness once more.

The cool, green water lapped round his feet, gently swishing the shingle backwards and forwards.

It had reached the second rung of the ladder.

"Come on, we'd better go," Tom said.

For a few moments Dolly stood looking down at the boy, she nudged him with her toe, but he didn't move. Then she followed Tom up the ladder, out into the warm sunshine, the heat a tangible thing as it quivered and danced on the metal deck.

They turned and looked down at the boy, still and quiet now, his arms spread out like the stems of a pale water plant in the twilight.

Tom dropped the iron lid of the conning tower with a clang that echoed round the rocks.

Slowly they clambered back to the beach, pausing now and then, glancing back at the submarine.

They climbed the cliff path and sat on the scorched grass, arms clasped round their knees.

Once Dolly thought she heard a thin, high scream, but it was only a wheeling gull uttering its sharp, nostalgic cry at a buzzard, sliding gently down the blue of the sky above the cliff top.

"Come on," Tom said at last, getting to his feet and holding out his hand "It must be lunch time, I'm starving."

They turned for a last look at the submarine.

The spray was breaking over the deck.

Soon it would be high tide.



SNAKES' EYES

TIM CARNABY

She had always hated snakes—particularly their cold black eyes.

FEVERYONE said it was madness for Vanessa Cobb to marry Doctor Palmer. For Doctor Anthony Wilcox Palmer was a naturalist, and his specialised field of study was snakes. And Vanessa Cobb had a pathological fear of snakes.

Vanessa's phobia had begun as a child in India. Her father, a wealthy tea-planter, had set up home amidst his Assam plantations. The timber-frame Colonial-style house was cool and airy, in contrast with the sultry atmosphere of the lowlands. Everyone admitted that it was one of the most pleasant houses in the province; the only problem was that the snakes thought so too.

They would slither from miles around, or so it seemed, just to curl up under the Cobbs' veranda—and come crawling out at night.

At first, when she still had the confidence of an innocent child, Vanessa had been intrigued and even fascinated by the snakes. One morning her father had broken into a cold sweat when he found her squatting with a glazed expression, watching a king cobra sway to and fro in front of her. When her father's revolver had snapped the beast's head off just below the hood, she burst into tears.

After that, she began to be afraid of snakes.

Her mother scolded her gently. It was ridiculous to be scared of snakes, especially when you had to live in a country infested with them. But the fear remained.

It was on her seventeenth birthday it happened. Her mother had invited children from all the neighbouring plantations to a birthday tea.

Most of the meal had been gulped down by the chattering children when Mrs. Cobb went to the kitchen to supervise the dishing out of ice-cream. There was a scream, followed by the shouts of the house-boy.

The children squirmed quickly down from the table and ran into the kitchen. Mrs. Cobb lay on the floor, unconscious and colourless. A trickle of blood marked one leg above the ankle. She had spilt the jug of ice-cream as she fell and, lying brown against the white, reared a huge king cobra, poised to strike a second time. Just before the house-

boy broke its back with one blow from a broom, little Vanessa saw its eyes. The cold black knowing eyes of a snake.

Vanessa returned to England the heiress to a large fortune and bought a mansion house in the New Forest. Ponies grazed in the paddock, the sun shone more like an amiable uncle than a cruel master, and only the dead bracken of the previous autumn marred the green of grass and heather. For Vanessa it was paradise.

Until she found the snake.

It was coiled in the kitchen, attracted perhaps by the coolness of the tiled floor. Much smaller than the cobra of so many years before, it was enough to evoke the memories.

She began to scream and carried on screaming until the gardener came and carried the snake outside. Then she fainted.

It took a fortnight's bed-rest before she had got over the initial shock. The doctor suspected a mild heart-attack, and it was several weeks before she was herself again. It had only been a harmless grass snake, they assured her. It was ridiculous to be scared of grass-snakes.

She realised she must get the house snake-proofed and that was how she met Doctor Palmer. He ran a herparium some five miles away, with a famous and exotic collection of reptiles—lizards, salamanders, iguanas, chameleons—and snakes. With his expert knowledge, he was obviously the man to ask for advice.

As long as the house was completely safe from snakes, money was no object, Vanessa Cobb said, after telling him of her phobia. While her back was turned, Doctor Palmer's quick, black eyes flicked over the room. The furnishings were of costly, genuine antiques.

The romance was swift and startling. Some said the attraction he held for her was uncanny—like the fascination a snake holds for a rabbit. But Doctor Palmer was suave and protective, just what Vanessa needed. He reassured her about her fears. It was ridiculous to be afraid of snakes, he told her. Yet there was no trace of mockery.

The engagement was brief.

The marriage was not a happy one. Doctor Palmer was considerate enough, but no more. Vanessa often thought he must be cold-blooded. As cold-blooded as a snake.

The marriage dragged on month after month. They kept up a gay front for their friends but, alone, they stayed in their rooms reading, or watched television in silence.

At the end of twelve months Doctor Palmer was ready to act.

Vanessa's inheritance was willed to him and was more than enough to keep him in luxury for the rest of his life while he continued his studies. And, after a year of ostensibly happy marriage, no one would suspect him of having murdered his wife. Yet that was what he intended to do.

It was a simple matter to get the report of the missing pair of cobras into the evening newspaper. Doctor Palmer could have told Vanessa himself, but it was psychologically more effective for her to find out for herself. She could spend all afternoon wondering about the escaped snakes . . .

"What's this about two escaped cobras?" she asked, a cold shake in her voice.

"Ah . . . I didn't want to worry you, dear. They'll turn up soon . . ."

Very soon. The two cobras, one dead and one very much alive, lay coiled in a basket in the boot of Doctor Palmer's car.

During their year of marriage, Vanessa had developed her own little routines. One of them was to make a pot of cocoa at ten-thirty to drink before going to bed.

When she walked into the kitchen, there was a surprise awaiting her.

From the television room, Doctor Palmer heard the long scream ending only in a dull thud. It seemed as if his scheme had worked. The dead cobra, coiled on the kitchen floor, had been enough to give poor Vanessa a heart attack. It was better that way.

Doctor Palmer calmly read his paper for a few more minutes, then folded it twice and put it down beside his chair. He rose and strolled into the kitchen. His wife lay crumpled beside the cooker, her complexion showing the tell-tale blue tinge of a heart victim. Smiling, Doctor Palmer reached down and picked up the coiled snake. His black, dead eyes darted round the room—and saw, kicked against the fridge, the limp brown form of the dead snake. Too late, he felt the cobra in his hand writhe, arch its hooded neck and strike, driving its fangs deep into the veins at his wrist.

He grunted and sat down abruptly. There was no time to drive to the herparium for serum, no time for anything. Only to sit on the cold floor as the dark red mists washed over him and think how he, a scientist, had forgotten the old wives' tale that a snake would always join its dead mate. Somehow, the second cobra must have escaped from its basket in the garage.

Doctor Palmer's cool knowing eyes glanced one last time at Vanessa. It was ridiculous to be scared of snakes . . .

FINAL SOLUTION

R. G. MALIN

She certainly wasn't the type of woman a man like John Greyson got mixed up with—if he had any sense. She was a tart, that's all. And a lot of men did go out with her, you know.

JOHN GREYSON murdered his wife and got rid of her body. But no-one knew of this until one night when he came out of his house and began walking up and down the street and laughing to himself, saying: "I've killed her! . . . I've killed her! . . ."

His neighbours thought his second wife, Betty, had left him for another man, everybody knowing what kind of woman *she* was . . . Everybody said that he had made a mistake when he married her. She certainly wasn't the type of woman a man like John Greyson got mixed up with, if he had any sense. She was a tart, that's all. A common tart. Ever since she'd divorced her first husband, Arthur, she had been carrying on with other men. It didn't matter to her who they were or what they looked like, so long as they wore trousers.

And a lot of men did go out with her, you know. You could see her with a different chap almost any night in the week, in the pubs and clubs in the neighbourhood. God alone knew what they saw in her. She wasn't attractive. She was gone forty and she was getting quite fat. She had dyed her hair blonde and there was that much make-up on her face you could have taken it off with a trowel. And the way she dressed? . . . Fancy a fat woman like her wearing mini-dresses and skirts and tight sweaters . . . she looked a proper sight!

Still, John Greyson did marry her, just the same. She must have seen that he was a chap she could get her hooks into, and made up her mind to marry him before she got too old for men to notice her. John Greyson wouldn't have realized what she was up to, not him. He was one of those quiet sort who kept himself to himself because he was too shy and unused to mixing with people properly.

He'd been married to his first wife, Celia, for more than twenty years and they had no children. Celia Greyson had been quiet and shy, too, and they got on well together, those two. But after she died, he was like a lost soul without her. Walked about in a kind of dream, and every now and then, if you saw him, you'd see the tears rolling down his cheeks and know that he was thinking about her.

But he must have grown tired of his loneliness, because he started to go out in the evening and got into the habit of having a quiet drink at one of the pubs. That was where he met Betty Gale. The next thing everyone knew was that he was going about with her; and in a couple of months they were married.

Of course, it didn't last. They seemed to be getting along all right; but after about twelve months Betty got fed up with playing housewife and went back to her old ways. She began going out on her own in the evening and was seen with other men, enjoying herself while her husband stayed at home and waited for her to return. Nobody told him what was going on, but he must have found out or guessed, because every night she went out he came out of the house every five minutes or so and stood at the gate looking out for her. He always looked so hurt and miserable that you couldn't help but feel sorry for him. And when Betty did come back, it was always around one or two o'clock in the morning so that it would have been useless for her to have hidden the truth from him; but probably she didn't care.

Then, of course, what everyone thought was inevitable, happened. One morning on his way to work, John Greyson called in the local newsagents while one or two of his neighbours were there and asked them if they'd seen his wife. She hadn't come home the night before and he didn't know what had happened to her. That same night he was asking other neighbours in the same street the same question—and, of course, they said that they didn't know, even though they made a guess.

That same night he shut himself up in his house and didn't come outside again for a month. During the first few days, people got curious about him and wondered if anything had happened to him without anyone knowing. But the chap who lived next door to him said that he had heard bumps and movements in the house, and that that should have proved that he was alive and well.

Then another neighbour with more concern decided to call on John Greyson just to make sure that he was all right; but all she got for her trouble was a curt reply to her knock telling her to go away. No-one bothered about him after the neighbour told others about it, and they might not have bothered about him when he *did* finally come out of the house, if it had not been for the fact that that was the night he went walking up and down the street declaring that he'd killed his wife.

One of those neighbours who heard and saw him thought he must have taken leave of his senses; and taking no chances he telephoned

both for the ambulance and the police.

When the ambulance and the police-car arrived on the scene, John Greyson was still in the street laughing to himself and saying that he had killed his wife. The two young policemen approached him and had a few quiet words with him, and then helped to put him in the ambulance.

After the ambulance had driven away, they went into the house and searched it, and found nothing. They came out of the house and got into their car and drove off, leaving a few curious neighbours staring after them.

At the hospital, John Greyson was taken into a small private ward and strapped to the bed until a doctor came to see him. With the doctor came a police detective, an Inspector. The Inspector questioned John Greyson but got nowhere. He lay on the bed staring with merry eyes at the ceiling, laughing all the while and repeating the same words again and again. "I've killed her! . . . I've killed her! . . ."

"I'm sorry," the doctor told the Inspector, "but I'm afraid you can't question the patient while he is in this condition. I shall have to give him a sedative."

The Inspector, a patient man, nodded his head understandingly. When the patient had been put into a restful sleep from the drug, the Inspector spoke for a few minutes with the doctor and took his leave.

As soon as the Inspector got back to his station, he asked for a couple of men; and when they had been given to him they all went to John Greyson's house to search for his wife's body, or for some sign that it had been there. But only a check of the rooms, for this was still at the inquiry stage.

Not finding any body, they left the house and went around questioning the neighbours about the Greysons. From the answers they received, it was apparent that Greyson had a motive for killing his wife. But had he killed her? Next, there was the fact that Greyson had shut himself up in his house for a month, and the incident where an inquiring neighbour had been told to go away. Had Greyson killed his wife and told his neighbour to go away because there was still some evidence about in the house? Or had his wife simply left him, and his self-induced misery over the fact made him short-tempered in his melancholy? Or was it simply that he didn't like that particular neighbour?

Had Greyson really killed his wife? He said he had, but then, on the day following her disappearance, he had anxiously asked a number of

his neighbours if they knew of her whereabouts. It could have been bluff, but it sounded rather as if he were worried about her disappearance. The next step would be to find the men she had been out with and question them.

This proved to be a formidable task, and the inquiries took a week or more. During the time they were being made, the Inspector made several visits to the hospital, but on each occasion Greyson had still been in the same frame of mind as on that first day he saw him. He had spasmodic bouts of laughing, during which he kept saying, "I've killed her!" with only one additional sentence. "You won't ever find the body!"

The body had to be found, of course. If it were possible. An application for a search-warrant was made and the warrant was granted. The police then made a thorough search of the house.

They searched the living-room and the kitchen, the bathroom and the pantry, the bedrooms and the attic. They searched every nook and cranny, but without success. So they went out into the garden and dug it up. But after many hours of hard work and sweat they had the same negative result. And the result put the police back where they had started. They had a statement by a man that he had killed his wife, but that man's mind was temporarily unbalanced. There was no body to substantiate his claim to murder. The next step was to try and trace the man's wife, if she were still alive; and that was most probable.

The man was transferred to a mental hospital for treatment while the police set about their investigation. There was no change in his condition.

The investigation was a long business. People were questioned; places and other people were visited; continuous telephone calls were made; footwork was continuous, and many interviews tiresome. With so much work to do and no results shown for their efforts, the police found it a tedious business, but they plodded on. They had to. The wife, Betty Greyson, could not be found; and this left the possibility that she *had* been murdered by her husband, and that he *had* got rid of her body. But where was the body then? What had he done with it? He was the only one who could tell them that.

The Inspector in charge of the case was enjoying a few minutes peace in the C.I.D. room at the station, when the telephone call from the mental hospital was put through to him. He picked up the receiver and quoted his name into the mouthpiece.

"Hello, Inspector," said the voice at the other end of the line. "My name is Doctor Bennett. I'm a psychiatrist at the Five Acres Mental Hospital. I believe you are investigating a claim made by one of my patients : John Greyson?"

"Yes, doctor," the Inspector felt a slight hint of hope.

"I examined the patient earlier this morning and for the first time I have been able to get him to say a little more. Unfortunately, he's relapsed into his former state of mind since and this is posing a slight problem at the moment . . . But I'm straying from the point a little, Inspector. What I have 'phoned you about is what Greyson said. I cannot guarantee the truth in it, but it is something you'll want to know."

"Yes, doctor. Please carry on."

"Well, Inspector, when I had him in my consulting-room this morning he was still saying that he had killed his wife. Tactfully, I persuaded him to tell me why and when and how. He said he killed her because he had discovered that she was being unfaithful to him. He said that when she came home late one evening after having been out with her fancy man, he stabbed her to death in the kitchen, with the carving knife. He said that on the following day he went to work as usual, but made believe to his neighbours that she had not returned home the previous evening. That same night he shut himself up in the house in order not to be disturbed while trying to think out a way of getting rid of the body. Trying to solve this problem must have given him a lot of mental strain.

"He gave it a great deal of thought. After killing his wife, he says, he became very frightened about the possible consequences to himself, and worried himself sick in trying to cover up his crime. He thought of several ways of disposing of the body, but he believed that in every case there was the chance that the body might be found, and his crime would be discovered. I think that at that time the strain on his mind must have been terrific. That is, if he did do as he says.

"Anyway, Inspector, he finally found a solution. I can only say myself that he must have had a complete mental breakdown even to have thought of such a thing. No man with his faculties intact would ever have thought of it, of that I am quite sure."

"And *what* did he do, doctor?" the Inspector asked.

"Well," the doctor continued, "using the carving-knife, he cut his wife's body into small pieces, with the intention of disposing of the pieces separately, all over the country if necessary. He wrapped each

piece in sheets of grease-proof paper—there was an ample supply in the house—and then spent several hours cleaning up the kitchen of every speck of blood and evidence. He burned the clothes his wife had been wearing.

"But after he did all this, he could not get the courage to go out of the house to dispose of the parts of her body. He felt sure that someone would stop and query him and find out what he had done. Yet he had to get rid of those parts of his wife's body. And he did, Inspector. In a rather gruesome way.

"He put them all into the fridge, and every day he cooked and ate them! They were his only meals, and it took him a month to get rid of them all!"

Listening, the Inspector felt suddenly very sick; but fought and overcame the urge to leave the room. The doctor continued :

"Well, anyway, Inspector, that is what Greyson said he did. It is up to you to decide whether he is telling the truth or not? . . . I did think of the bones, Inspector, and I asked him how he had disposed of them. He said that he broke them up with a hammer, ground them in the food-mixer, and made a fine dust of them before flushing it away down the toilet."

The doctor finished speaking and there was a long pause, during which the Inspector remained silent. Then the doctor spoke again :

"As I say, Inspector, I cannot guarantee the truth of Greyson's story. It would explain his mental condition if he did commit such an act; but that we shall have to find out for ourselves. In his present condition it might simply be a morbid imagination. But perhaps we'll learn the real truth when Greyson has undergone our treatment and is well again."

* * *

But John Greyson never got well again. His mental condition is still as it was on the night the police picked him up; and he is still a patient at the Five Acres Mental Hospital.

He is not a troublesome patient, and the staff there are still trying to help him. They show him kindness and pity and have long since come to consider as harmless his habit of leaving his room each night to wander the long silent corridors, whose walls echo his soft throaty chuckles and his words, "I killed her! . . . I killed her! . . ."

But the staff, too, take the precautionary measure of making sure that his diet is strictly vegetarian . . .

WHIRR-WHIRR

A. W. BENNETT

How could he relax with the Widow Rexam's sewing machine going "whirr-whirr" day and night, two months after she had died? Noises in his head it could be . . . symptoms of his heart disease perhaps?

WHIRR-WHIRR. Martin Croft (Scrooge to his neighbours, he had no friends) sat up in bed sharply, then sank back slowly to the pillows. He must remember what the doctor had said: "No sudden exertion. No shocks, impulses on emotion. Just take things easy. Can't be too careful with a heart like yours. I'll call again in a week."

Of course, Martin hadn't allowed that. Doctors charge fees. That whirr-whirr again in the room above. "Just take things easy?" How could he with Widow Rexam's sewing machine starting up like that and she dead these two months and he himself had personally sold her sewing machine and everything else she possessed—which wasn't much.

Whirr-whirr. Quite clearly in the otherwise silent little house. No, it couldn't be. Noises in the head. Symptoms of his heart ailment maybe. Whirr-whirr. Most certainly in the empty room above, quite definitely the widow's old machine, he could almost feel the vibrations.

He put a finger in each ear and poked vigorously. Whirr-whirr. Not in his head. In the room above. Nellie's room. She'd put her head in the gas oven. Not his fault: although he'd told her to get rid of her machine or get out. The noise irritated him.

"I've oiled it, done all I can to quieten it," she'd wailed. "It's getting old and worn-out like me. You want your money, I must work for it."

"That's your worry. Rid the place of that machine or get out." She'd got out—via the gas oven. A very old gas oven actually, with a separate meter. Martin knew exactly how much you had to put in a room to let it "furnished, self-contained". Just as much as was in the room above and all second-hand.

Whirr-whirr. Her, or her ghost. He'd seen her buried, although he'd left the council to pay for it. Could they come back from a pauper's grave?

Whirr-whirr came the answer. If he climbed upstairs and was confronted by an apparition what would it do to his heart?

Some people said he ought to have paid the funeral expenses from the sale of her trinkets and the sewing machine, but they didn't understand the value of money.

Whirr-whirr. A ghost machine. A wraith working it! A spectral widow!

Martin Croft shivered; a dank chill gripped him, froze his marrow. Cold air sinks: this deadly emanation was dripping from the phantom woman above!

Lying shivering was bad for his heart. Have to go up and see. Don't climb stairs, the doctor had ordered.

Stanley Miller, the present tenant of the room above, had courted Nellie Malone—as she was—but she'd chosen Rexam, and Miller had never married. He'd been an animal trainer at a circus until a black panther tore him. Then he'd grown old doing odd jobs at the circus until he got his pension. The circus was back in the big town near, that's why he was away, gone to the circus and would stay the night in a friend's caravan.

So the room above was empty. Whirr-whirr the ghostly machine contradicted.

Whirr-whirr. Alone in the house with a ghostly, ghastly apparition—a lost soul who couldn't be idle.

Miller had wanted to bring his dog Sambo, a black Labrador, but Martin wasn't having any. No pets. Miller had left the dog with a friend at the circus. But, like a soft-hearted fool, Martin had allowed him to keep his hamster.

"Look, Mr Croft, I've been with animals all my life." Miller pleaded. "I must have something alive for company. He'll be no bother, silent as the grave, he couldn't bark, miaow or twitter if he tried."

A silly mouse-like brown thing in a cage, asleep all day, awake doing nothing all night, let him keep it.

Whirr-whirr, yet the room was empty. Buck up courage, no such thing as ghosts. Pausing half-way up the stairs panting; a tearing pain in his chest at the top. Door unlocked, he hadn't provided a key.

Martin stepped inside and switched on the light; separate meter. A room silent, almost bare: bed, table, chair, stove. Cage on the table. The hamster squatting, staring at him with bright beady eyes unwinking.

"I've left plenty of food for Hammy in his cage," were Miller's last

words before he left. "Apples, cheese. He'll be okay until I come back tomorrow."

Foolish things hamsters. Food costs money; and that cage with the wheel, swing, steps, mirror. Where had the whirr-whirr gone? Nothing here.

Downstairs again, and even coming down made the pain in his chest worse.

Whirr-whirr. Ghosties and hob-goblins and things that go whirr-whirr in the night.

Was there a clock up there with a loose spring or something? Anything to explain it.

Up again and oh that pain in his chest and down again and whirr-whirr.

Up at full tilt angry desperate and afraid.

* * *

The milkman saw through the window the crumpled figure at the foot of the stairs.

"Heart," the policeman told Miller that night when he returned from the circus with his dog.

Miller nodded and shrugged. "The doctor told me he expected it," he said.

The policeman walked away, idly wondering why Miller had brought his dog back with him. Miller made purring noises into the Hamster's cage.

"You did fine, Hammy, just what I expected. Now I'll tighten that wheel again so you can play on it silently. We don't want it to go whirr-whirr all the time now it's done its job; and I'll take away those brass ashtrays from under the table legs, they only make it vibrate and sound louder downstairs. Nellie Rexam was a good soul."



INTENT TO KILL?

JOHN PATERSON

The phone conversation hadn't really meant anything to her at the time, but words had stayed at the back of her mind . . . faintly menacing.

WHEN Clarissa opened the drawer of her husband's desk in the study and saw the black, snub-nosed revolver lying there, she knew he intended to kill her.

Her first impulse was to call the police—but would they believe her? What evidence did she really have? Quickly she ran her mind over the events that had taken place since she first met John . . .

If it hadn't been for the £5,000 she had won on "Ernie", they would never have met. She was an orphan, and at the age of twenty-five still single, so when the money came to her out of the blue she decided to use some of it on having the holiday of a lifetime. She had gone to the South of France, and it was there that John's path had crossed hers.

He was unlike anyone she had ever met—tall, handsome, debonair, and he literally swept her off her feet.

Clarissa had told him about the money shortly after they first met, but it hadn't seemed to matter to him at all.

"Once we're married, darling," he said, "you'll have me to support you. It won't matter whether you have any money or not . . ."

"Married?" Clarissa blinked.

"Yes, darling." He took her in his arms. "There's no reason to wait, is there?"

So they had been married as soon as they returned from France. But now she realised how hasty she had been, how little she really knew of her husband except that he was "something in the theatre" . . .

Clarissa stood fingering the gun in horror. Upstairs she could hear the water running as John took a bath. He had planned it all, she could see that now. That was why after their marriage he had rented this house in the country, lonely and isolated . . .

Clarissa remembered the photograph she had found in his pocket two weeks ago. She had been getting some things ready to send to the cleaners, and decided to send one of John's suits along too. While she

was emptying the pockets, the photograph had fallen out.

It was a woman, blonde and attractive and hard-eyed. Across the photograph was written, "All my love, darling."

It had been natural for her to assume that the photo was one of an old girl-friend, something in his past he didn't want to talk about. But now, as she stood at the desk in his study, she could see how blind she had been. The woman wasn't someone in his past—but in his present . . .

Then, of course, there had been the "accident". It was ten days ago and John had taken her up to town for dinner and a show. They were walking along a busy pavement when John had stumbled and knocked against her, throwing her out into the street—right into the path of an oncoming car.

Luckily the driver had quick reflexes. At the last moment he had managed to swerve, missing her by a fraction.

John was by her side in an instant, his arms round her. "I'd never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you . . ." he said.

She had thought no more about it, except perhaps to be a little touched by John's concern. But now, in the light of what she had just realised, the incident took on a far more sinister aspect . . .

The time when she should really have realised the truth, she thought, was two days ago. She had come into the study just as John was speaking on the phone. His voice was low, but she had caught a few words.

"Don't worry," he was saying. "I'll find some way to get rid of her . . ."

He had stopped speaking almost immediately Clarissa came into the room, and hung up.

The phone conversation hadn't really meant anything to her at the time, but the words had stayed at the back of her mind, somehow faintly menacing. But she hadn't realised their significance until tonight, when she came into the study looking for paper to write a letter, and saw the gun. Then, suddenly, everything clicked into place.

John had married her for her money, and from the first day they met, he had planned to kill her—because there was another woman in his life, and once she, Clarissa, was out of the way he would have both.

Her hand was already on the phone to call the police when she heard John coming downstairs. She had been so busy thinking that she hadn't heard him running away the bath water.

For a moment she hesitated, terrified, unsure what to do. She was wearing a cotton dress with very large pockets, and on impulse she

slipped the gun into one of them.

She was already moving away from the desk when the door of the study opened and John walked in, in his dressing-gown. His dark hair was still wet and was sleeked down.

"Hello, darling," he said, with his easy smile. "I saw the light. What are you doing in here?"

"I—I was looking for some paper to write a letter." She watched him walk towards the desk, and only then did she realise she had left the drawer lying slightly open. If he saw it, then he would know she had found the gun . . .

He turned round, and she couldn't tell from his face whether he had noticed the open drawer or not. He frowned. "What's the matter darling? You're trembling . . ."

He stepped towards her, reaching out to take her in his arms, and instinctively she backed away.

"It's no use, John," she said. "I know."

He frowned. "What do you mean, you know? What are you talking about?"

She took a deep breath. "I know you're planning to kill me . . ."

He stood looking at her for a moment, and then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Kill you? I suppose this is a joke of some sort . . .?"

"Can you deny it?" she cried. "What about—what about the day you pushed me in front of the car?"

"Pushed you—" His mouth fell open and he stared at her. "Darling, are you serious? That was an accident—you know it was!"

He sounded genuinely bewildered. Clarissa hesitated, suddenly uncertain.

"Was it? Well, you don't know that I found a photo of another woman in your pocket. How do you explain that?"

"Another woman . . .?" He frowned. "Oh, of course, that would be Rhona! You mean you thought . . ." He laughed, showing his white teeth. "Darling, she's an actress. She was in the last play I put on, and she sent me the photo as a keepsake, that's all."

"She seemed to know you very well," Clarissa said acidly. "Well enough to call you 'darling'!"

He smiled. "Clarissa, don't you know that in the theatre everyone calls everyone else 'darling'?"

Clarissa hesitated. She wanted to believe him—and yet . . .

"There's another thing," she said. "I heard you talking to someone on the phone. You said: 'I'll find some way to get rid of her.' What did that mean if it didn't mean you were going to kill me?"

In her heart she wanted him to give her a convincing answer. She watched anxiously as a frown passed across his face, as if trying to recall the incident she referred to. Then suddenly his face cleared.

"I remember! I was talking to my producer that day. We had signed an actress for our latest play, and then we discovered she wasn't right for the part."

He was leaning against his desk, his hands behind him, and now he said in a quiet voice, "You actually thought I was going to kill you, Clarissa? Don't you know that I love you?"

A wave of relief swept through her. If only she had trusted him more. There was such a simple explanation for everything really.

"Yes, I—" she began—and then she remembered. She put her hand in her pocket and felt the cold hardness of the gun. It was the one thing he couldn't explain away.

She drew it out slowly. "What about this?" she asked wearily. "Why did you want a gun?"

This time he threw back his head and really laughed aloud. "So you found that old thing! Darling, I'm in the theatre—I pick up dozens of these sort of souvenirs. It isn't real—it's a stage gun we once used in a murder play!"

For a moment Clarissa looked incredulously at the gun in her hand and then she too began to laugh, a little hysterically. A stage gun! Why hadn't she thought of that? How could she ever have believed—

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry," she gasped. "I'm sorry..."

"And so you should be," he said, smiling. He left the desk and walked towards her, his hands behind his back.

"A stage gun!" Clarissa giggled, shaking her head. "And I thought—I thought you were going to do this..."

Mischievously she lifted the gun and pointed it at him as he approached.

"Bang," she said, "you're dead," and pulled the trigger, expecting to hear an empty click.

Clarissa screamed in horror as there was a deafening explosion. For a moment John stood, staring at her with a stupid expression on his face, then he toppled slowly forward, the razor sharp paper knife that had been concealed behind his back falling from his hand . . .

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CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books

"SUNDAY THE RABBI STAYED HOME", by Harry Kemelmann, (*Hutchinson Ltd.*, 25s.).

This third of the "Rabbi" stories gives us a well-made plot and much shrewd observation of social attitudes today.

For my part I like a setting I do not know—in this case the Jewish one—and here we have the temple in Barnard's Crossing with young Rabbi David Small rushing through his service at breakneck speed—"seven minutes ahead of schedule" as he must get to his place of business in good time . . .

The action of the story takes place during the Passover holiday with all its traditional claims on the young Rabbi—yet he still finds himself deeply involved in the social problems of the younger generation—the new freedoms, the race relationships, drugs . . . and unexpectedly murder.

Only one criticism—it would be valuable to the non-Jewish to have a brief glossary explaining the religious terms.

"THE FENNISTER AFFAIR", by Josephine Bell (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 21s.).

A girl is given the present of a Caribbean cruise by her uncle—though all is not quite as serene and happy on board the *Selena*—as Sally Combes soon discovers.

For Sally has been given the cabin of a missing woman and finds there what looks like a suicide note left by her.

All too soon for Sally's hoped-for relaxing holiday, a pattern of violence emerges which threatens to involve almost anyone on board.

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This is the third case of Detective Chief Inspector Masters - the first was *Nobody's Perfect*, which brought wide acclamation for a brilliant new writer. 25/-

Charles Whitman

DOCTOR DEATH

The first story by a new Australian writer with a well founded appreciation of the rules of the classic murder mystery. 25/-

"THE INTERCOM CONSPIRACY", by Eric Ambler (*Weidenfeld & Nicolson*, 25s.).

A new novel from Eric Ambler is a treat that is well worth savouring slowly and carefully—indeed re-reading at least once and *never* lending to a friend. For you will not get this one back.

Written in brilliant, witty and sometimes extremely moving style, "The Intercom Conspiracy" intrigues us from first disappearance of "historian" Charles Latimer Lewison at Geneva's Coitron airport to journalist Theodore Carter's final and quiet walk back from the Spanish inn past the still missing Lewison's villa.

The central theme of the novel is around an international weekly newsletter *Intercom* controlled by a foundation that is apparently fighting communism. Registered in Switzerland, *Intercom* has however some very sinister side lines and it is into these that Theodore Carter dips.

Polished, hard-hitting and infinitely engrossing is this new contribution from a now world-famous name in espionage writing.

"THE LITTLE SISTER" by Raymond Chandler (*Hamish Hamilton*, 25s.).

Anyone whose taste for crime fiction includes the rugged Philip Marlowe should like this (if they have not read it in recent years). As a twenty-year-old story it is somewhat dated. Here the lone private-eye's uninvited client is a seemingly prissy small-town girl (who rejoices in the

unbelievable name of Orfamy Quest) in search of her missing brother. You could call this 'Marlowe's quest' as, in his usual style, it takes in a fair proportion of movie stars and organised racketeers. All characters belong to the 'thirties to 'forties era—Orfamy being prim, bespectacled and minus make-up; for those too young to remember, this was when men only made passes to girls without glasses (Orfamy actually gets the odd pass when she takes hers off), and a face full of cosmetics was the 'in' thing. Gangsters are crude and tough, and the glamour girls are generally well covered with both make-up and slinky clothes. At least one is spared the belaboured descriptions of unadorned sex (the tedium of so many books today), while the intrepid Marlowe battles his way (hard liquor, fisticuffs, guns and all) through the sleazy areas of California to the solution of this rather strange puzzle—a task that he took on simply because he was bored.

"HUNT TO KILL", by Martin Russell (*Collins Ltd.*, 21s.).

Suspected of stabbing a girl, Harry Minch goes to earth in quiet digs under the watchful eye of landlady Mrs. Perry—a "frustrated mother type". But not for very long, as Minch is suspected by the police of being a mass murderer and only one person in the world has faith in his innocence.

The book goes fast and factually, but is too full of dialogue for easy reading.

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"DIE QUICKLY, DEAR MOTHER", by Tobias Wells (*Robert Hale Ltd.*, 18s.).

If you can read the American language with ease then this is a quick running "open and shut" murder story for you. If you are irritated by American spelling, words like gotten and the U.S. Court scenes, then you must try and bully publishers to translate some of the quite excellent crime stories coming our way from that continent.

A sordid family story with cantankerous, senile Eileen Kayser accusing her two daughters of starving and beating her and then moving in on son Starrett to change her will in his favour. Only to die shortly afterwards of an overdose of digitalis.

Once you have swallowed spelling, U.S. Court proceedings and those (to me) irritating no-longer-English words—then this is a first-rate yarn.

"SHOTGUN", by Ed McBain (*Hamish Hamilton*, 21s.).

This latest in the 87th Precinct stories from a famous writer is an outstanding essay into the mind of a policeman tackling a sordid crime.

When innocent people are found with most of their heads blown off by shotgun blast at short range, another wild race against time in the crazy circuit of detection goes into motion.

This is an excellent story written with a gritty sense of humour and no omission of gruesome facts. McBain never spares his readers—so this is not for the squeamish.

"MAIGRET AND THE MINISTER", by Georges Simenon (*Hamish Hamilton*, 18s.).

A well written story will stand the test of time, and a good translation will help to keep it in the top bracket of fiction. This 1954 vintage novel comes over well, aided by the translation of Moura Budberg (and, possibly, good editing) written, as it is, in the modern idiom.

It is Maigret at his best—not too many characters to confuse one, although this time the shrewd Paris Superintendent gets caught up in politics. This is an unusual role for the reputable detective who, normally, makes a point of steering clear of politics and politicians.

The plot is not littered with corpses, apart from the unfortunate victims of a sanatorium disaster that triggers off the whole investigation; however, top level politicians are involved, plus a good measure of suspense centred around Maigret, who has to add diplomacy to his methodical methods in solving this intrigue-ridden puzzle.

This is a 'can't-put-it-down' kind of book.

"A LOVER TOO MANY", by Roy Lewis (*Collins Ltd.*, 21s.).

The first crime story by a barrister is always an important addition to a publisher's lists, and I am quite sure that this book is going to be a success.

It has a good neat plot, authenticity, and after suspense and tribulations an extremely clever summing-up.

Good and compelling reading and I hope many more to follow.

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"**MOURNING RAGA**", by Ellis Peters, (*Macmillan & Co.* 25s.).

Ellis Peters—translator of prose and poetry under her own name has now adopted a pseudonym for her new novel "Mourning Raga." Set in India the book tells the story of abduction for ransom of a fourteen-year-old girl, an heiress who is put in the charge of young Dominic Felse and his girl-friend Tossa to be escorted to her father in Delhi.

Anjli, the girl in question, is a precocious and individualistic youngster who attempts to wriggle from her captors to freedom—with disastrous results. The mystery which is India forms the backdrop to an outstanding narrative which culminates in two startling revelations bringing the novel to a climactic ending.

Ellis Peters is one of the few novelists to have won the Mystery Writers of America 'Edgar' prize for the best novel of the year.

"**CRY ON MY SHOULDER**", by Hartley Howard (*Hamish Hamilton Ltd.*, 25s.).

Glenn Bowman, private eye is on yet another New York hire job and as usual the action sizzles and explodes from chapter to chapter.

A client—Winifred Newell says she only "wants to know if there is any substance in her ex-husband's insistence that he has committed murder—that of poisoning his uncle . . ."

It sounds a calm enough request but in this book ace investigator Bowman has "a nice cosy chat that could have taught the Inquisition a thing or

two" long before that riddle is solved.

Indeed Bowman finds he has to sleep with door bolted and "his old friend" ready under the pillow.

The really excellent thing about this author is that far from fantasy, the stories seem credible. Read this and agree.

"COFFIN'S DARK NUMBER", by Gwendoline Butler (*Geoffrey Bles Ltd.*, 21s.).

This author cannot be pinned down to any one formula, I am happy to say. In "Coffin's" latest round of investigation—set against a weird background of U.F.O.'s sightings, there is the mysterious disappearance of a number of little girls—each an individual in her own right.

Child crime follows a certain pattern—or so the experts consider, and it is Coffin's job to find out that pattern.

This is compulsive reading with a most unexpected ending. I like "Coffin" and I like Mrs. Butler's mastery of crime writing very much indeed.

"ROBBERY BLUE", by Roger Busby (*Collins, Ltd.*, 21s.).

Author Roger Busby is a crime reporter on a Midland paper and so knows police procedure intimately. Thus the book reads fast and accurately from the first tip-off to the police of an impending wages grab to the full-time battle of the law against big business in crime.

Good, expert handling of an only too contemporary crime theme.

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